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from

Pauline Smith-

who enjoyed writing
this better than the
public enjoyed its reading

N O M A D



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The House among the Willows

NOMAD

By
PAUL JORDAN-SMITH

AUTHOR OF "CABLES OF COBWEB," "ON
STRANGE ALTARS," ETC.

"Fay ce que voudras"

—RABELAIS



Illustrated by
J. D. LAUDERMILK

NEW YORK
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❧ *TO the Right Honorable and most worthy master of letters, and maker of golden fables, James Branch Cabell, Esq., of Dumbarton Grange,—Gentleman and Virginian.*

* * *

Your well earned fame, Sir, needs no tribute from my all too feeble pen, but, for that you have added so much luster to my native state—already fortunate through the deeds of your illustrious Grandsires; for that the tales of your imagining have, by their grace and ingenuity, made New England, with her Hawthorne, to share laurels with the South; for that you have given me so many hours of keen joyance and forthright laughter; for that I am already overladen with the debt of your benefits, I beg leave, Sir, most respectfully to dedicate to you, as a slight token of my beholdenness, this small volume.

*I am, Sir,
y'r most obedient Servant,*

PAUL JORDAN-SMITH.

*At my house, Erewhon,
this 22nd day of January, 1925.*

CONTENTS

		PAGE
	<i>The Sad Adventure of a Literary Moonshiner</i>	I
CHAPTER		
1.	<i>Prelude—in a Minor Key</i>	7
2.	<i>The House Among the Willows</i>	14
3.	<i>The Chronicle of a Shining Skull</i>	29
4.	<i>A Curious Trinity of Misfits</i>	47
5.	<i>Wild Women and the Philosopher's Stone</i>	67
6.	<i>Enlightenment by Violence</i>	91
7.	<i>The Inhospitality of a Den of Thieves</i>	116
8.	<i>The Amazing Giants of the Stone Mortar</i>	151
9.	<i>A Chorus of Pismires</i>	170
10.	<i>The Cave of Clauneck</i>	193
11.	<i>A Ghost Dance in a Village Graveyard</i>	221

ILLUSTRATIONS

The House among the Willows . . .	
	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	<small>FACING PAGE</small>
“With a single movement of his jaws he would devour a mighty forest” . . .	162
“A detector of filth in literature and art”	230

NOMAD

THE SAD ADVENTURE OF A LITERARY MOONSHINER



BACK at college Lucian Conroy was looked upon as a precocious esthete but lately graduated from mamma's apron strings, and destined for a chair

of language in a perfectly correct seminary for young ladies. I am ashamed to say that I shared this somewhat general belief and that, at the outset, I sought his acquaintance, less by reason of his personal charm, than because of his superior ability to render both Greek and German into a tolerable imitation of English prose.

But even then, desperate parasite that I was, I found more in the man than his mincing, effeminate air, his high tenor voice, and his diminutive stature seemed to promise. For

one thing, he displayed a knowledge of human nature years beyond his meager experience. Finding my excessive demands for the elucidation of Schiller and Sophocles a deadly bore, he hit upon a device worthy of an astute pedagogue. "Do you know," he would say, when I would descend upon his room with a particularly difficult passage, "I would love to go into that if I had more time, for old X has hinted that, buried somewhere in the depths of this paragraph is the key to a most elaborate cryptogram. It is a mystery that has puzzled more than one scholar." Or, with a curious wink, he would suggest—"Say, it's a wonder they let us read this, it's so deucedly improper and full of smut."

Whatever skill I may have acquired in translation I owe to Conroy.

But none of us suspected the man's courage; and when, at our fifth class reunion, we met at the banquet table to relate our triumphs we were utterly unprepared to hear that this quiet, piping, little man had become the terror of all the moonshiners and blockaders

of southern Appalachia. He was a revenue officer. From that day on, Lucian Conroy has been the mystery and thrill of our class; and, because he was early acquainted with my curious tastes, I have more than once been the recipient of his neatly penned accounts of the romances and tragedies of the highland outlaw.

In the summer of 1914, just before the World War shook everything to pieces, I received the letter—and, later, the package—which has finally resulted in the making of this book. Conroy wrote:

“Another raid and another mystery—this time, a mystery which, I am sure, will stir your enfeebled pulses, even in the far off West. . . . When I went into the hills I was told that our man was an ‘outlander,’ a foreigner—which is to say, a man from, perhaps, ten miles away, down in the valley; and that he was a person of education and cunning, who, because of some misfortune, had turned misanthrope and law breaker. From this rumor I reasoned that the block-

ader was probably no more than able to read and write. . . .

“But the man had fled. . . . We destroyed the still, and even—against my advice—burned the cabin, which was at once his home and factory. Before taking this drastic step, however, I made a careful search. . . . And beneath the bed I found what seemed to be a small pillow. I was on the point of throwing it aside when one of my assistants suggested that it might contain money—these mountaineers stuff their bills, when they have any, poor devils!—in odd places. You may be thankful that I followed his advice, for, under another cover, I am sending you the entire contents of the most singular package it has been my good fortune to run across. (By the way, don’t be disappointed at not finding a bottle!)”

Naturally I was curious, and when at last the postman delivered the parcel into my hand I could not wait to untie the strings. I tore it open to find . . . shucks!

My first impulse was to consign the stuff

to the fire and dismiss the whole affair as a stupidly conceived practical joke. . . . Then I saw the writing.

What at first glance had seemed mere husks of Indian corn, proved to be the leaves of a rude manuscript, covered with almost microscopic writing in pale red ink. The unfortunate author, probably unable to obtain more suitable materials, had pressed flat and pasted together the outer shucks of that grain from which he distilled his mountain dew, and on that crude papyrus had told his story. Liquor and literature!

Not long afterward, in response to an eager letter of inquiry, Conroy wrote me that the misguided romancer had met the usual fate—a bullet; that he had come, from all accounts, of a good family who would be pained to have his real name made public; and that, prior to his flight from a substantial valley home, he had spent four years at a Southern university.

Conroy is inclined to the belief that the story reeks with *double entente*, and is by way of being a satire. Indeed he went so far

as to maintain that the whole thing is a diatribe against some of our most revered institutions; a covert blow at many cherished American traditions. But when I pointed out to him—somewhat indignantly, I must confess—the utter absurdity of believing that a Southerner, even one who had so far forsaken his class as to become a refugee and a bootlegger, could ever be other than an intense patriot and a loyal defender of all our social faiths, he was manifestly shaken, and came, eventually, to see with me that the story is no other than it appears on its surface,—a queer, picaresque and, sometimes, outrageous yarn.

That is all I—a mere editor—have to say. But no, I will add this word more: If the reader be shocked by the impropriety of this weird tale; if his moral sense be injured; if the incongruities of the narrative arouse his wonder; if its indelicacies move him to passion, I ask in return—what can he expect out of an atmosphere reeking with moonshine?

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE—IN A MINOR KEY



T was a strange mountain, surely. Out of Tennessee it came, upright, moving straight forward, keeping a decent level of propriety, and maintaining a southward course without either side-stepping or evasion. But here, after crossing the Georgia line, it zigzagged about in a most unseemly fashion, resembling nothing so much as a tormented serpent. Undecided, blind, Egypt's mountain seemed to have forgotten its original destiny. It was not, however, an unlovely serpent that showed beneath the waning light of the spring sun, for its winding green coils were splashed with patterns of flowering dogwood and red bud; and, just here, where the erratic creature had wrinkled its skin into particularly sharp folds, creating a swift descending gulch, were two

almost Edenic spots, clustered with young pine and laurel. A realistic tourist might say, in passing, that this canyon was a mere gash of, perhaps, one hundred and fifty feet in width, separating two shrub-covered limestone cliffs: and, sad to tell, the folk at Potter's Corner called the place Ole Choppin' Block. Nevertheless there was a well defined tradition thereabouts that, during the spring seasons, the Choppin' Block inspired more poetry than any other place whatsoever, and was the source of the rarest flowers in the world. And if cynics—and they are everywhere, curse them—observed that the urge to creative song lasted but a single flowering time, and declared that the spot was a roosting place for storks, and a source of unconventional creation whose fruits turned budding romance into grave responsibility, a new generation of poets but laughed them to scorn. Besides, no stork had ever been seen, outside of a story book!

Certainly it had been a center of undisturbed peace during the fore part of the afternoon, and the home-building birds had, quite

naturally, supposed that they might consider this obviously superior site their very own. But their contented chirrups were not to be the only music of the mountain top; for, as the shadows of the young pines began to stretch out mightily toward the east, there came, from behind a laurel screen on one side of the Block, a whistle that was quite unmistakably human. Damn! said the birds, annoyed by the discord. Then, as if in rebuke for this unnatural profanity, there came yet another whistle, so soft and musical as to rival the thrushes at their best; this time the sound issued from the thicket on the opposite cliff. Disgusted birds flew to the tree tops in dismay.

Frog went a courtin' an' a he did a ride, um, h'm,
Frog went a courtin' an' a he did a ride,
Sword and pistol by his side, um, h'm——

—came, in a very froggy voice, from the first cliff.

He rode up to Miss Mouse's door, um, h'm,
He rode up to Miss Mouse's door,
He had been there oft before, um, h'm——

—was the gentler answer from the other side.

Look out, France. I'm throwing you a kiss, said the first, in a masculine drawl.

The clattering sound of a small missile falling among the bushes caused the birds to seek yet higher branches. Then, after a few moments, there came a similar sound from the other side, accompanied by the feminine announcement: I reckon I'll be a throwin' one too, but I ortent to be a doin' nothin' a the kind.

Can't I come around there for a while, France?

No, ye can't come around.

Won't you put your head out so I can see?

No! Pap says that seein' is too much of a strain on the flesh like. Aint you contented that I'm able to do this much, Jawn? An' even now, if Pap seed ye, he mought take a notion fer to shoot,—though I'm bound to say that he aint said nothin' agin us talkin'.

The next come up was the old tom cat, um, h'm,
The next come up was the old tom cat,
He says I'll put a stop to that, um, h'm——

—croaked the one called Jawn.

If you're a goin' to make fun a Pappy, I'm goin' to up an' git home right off.

Oh, the devil, France! Come on and let's go get married, and put a stop to this foolishness. I'm tired of waitin', and it isn't fair to either of us.

I'm not a goin' to leave my pappy, even fer you, Jawn Howe. If you hadn't of argified with him none, he wouldn't of a threatened ye.

Well, he was always against me.

An' you was allers a makin' him think you was stuck up, an was lookin' down on mountain folks like; and you know he thinks 'Piscypalians aint no better than pole cats.

I love you, France.

Well, if ye do, mind what I say, an' keep clean away from our house.

But we can come here . . . ?

I'm afeard not, Jawn. I had to dodge purty careful this evenin', an' I'm thinkin' that Pappy tried to trail me.

Something about this recital seemed to amuse her lover, for he again burst out into song:

The goose she then flew up the wall, um, h'm,
The goose she then flew up the wall,
And the old tom cat put a stop to it all, um, h'm.

Ye air so makin' fun!

Cross my heart and hope I may die I'm not. But France, you're surely not going to allow your father to ruin our lives that way! I can't believe it's you,—who used to be so independent and free. Do you know how long we've been going together? and do you remember how we used to fish down at the old mill dam? and how we waded around lookin' for craw fish bait? and how I used to carry you home from school?

And it would a been like that yit if ye hadn't a argified, an' said that feuds was cowardly and uncivilized.

People carried tales.

Hit aint me, Jawn; it's Pappy.

But you're going to stand by and take whatever he says?

I am that. He's a good pappy to me, an' don't you forgit it.

You don't love me!

You know durn well I do, but if we keep

a talkin' I won't; an' so let me tell ye hit's the last time we can have a holler, 'til I can git Pappy around to my way a thinkin'.

Then I reckon it's never, France; so I might just as well get out of this country and stay . . . I don't suppose anybody would care!

The voice from the opposite cliff came back a bit more crisply, and, if the listener had been in a condition to discern he might have heard, beneath the sharper accent, a note of pain.

Well, if ye want to take it that a way, Jawn, I'm not a hinderin' ye. . . . Good-by, Jawn.

France! Please!

Good-by, Jawn.

And, presently, all was silent, while, from their places of retreat, the timid home-builders came down to resume their labors.

Good-by, ladies, gentlemen and all, um, h'm, —floated down from somewhere in the entangled cliffs.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE AMONG THE WILLOWS

I



THE old Dutch farmhouse crouched down among the weeping willows like an ancient and encrusted saurian, and with every passing breeze the rotting shingles, coated with gray lichen and green moss, shifted and sighed uneasily, whilst the protesting frame beneath groaned with the voice of a troubled spirit. Through the cracked window panes the winds whistled and wheezed, and against the lean-to shed in the rear the damp boughs of a drooping tree beat a sad and mournful tattoo. In the neglected garden fennel had sprung up, and beside the ragged lilacs was the deadly jimson weed. One lone apple tree was struggling against malignant liverworts that now sent

roots into its heart after the fashion of a most loathsome cancer. Nightshade grew in the corners of the crumbling worm fence that straggled about the place; under the broken eaves were toadstools and ratsbane.

At the front of the house was a veranda, on the single rail of which three damp and clinging shirts disported themselves in a melancholy abandon; on the same rail was a shelf whereon stood a brass-bound bucket, from which protruded the black handle of a dipper and beside which sat a tin wash basin. These were the sole tokens of recent human occupancy.

This moldering human habitation, flanked by two or three dilapidated out-houses, stood at the back of a small farm that lay beneath Egypt's Mountain, and the red gullies that gashed the surface of the land like crimson wounds bore ample testimony to either a thriftless weariness of the flesh or to a philosophy of despair. The smoother pastures that spread out below, in fat contrast, were rolling billows of green jade whereon white sheep moved contentedly like figures of new ivory.

Winding down the mountain through pine and scrub oak and laurel was a tortuous roadway, studded with great stones and marked with treacherous washes at such frequent intervals that it required a nice dexterity on the part of the countryman from t'other side to guide his valley-bred mare, and keep the frail buggy from upsetting. The timid passenger at his side, a traveling salesman who now and then crossed the mountain to Potter's Corner, had suggested often enough, since the descent began, that he should get out and walk,—just to relieve the strain on the harness. But it was no part of the countryman's plan to deprive himself of this opportunity for displaying a vast knowledge of local history. So his terrified companion, tightly grasping an arm of the seat, and drawing in his feet to be ready for an instant leap to safety, was an unwilling and inattentive listener until, after ages, it seemed, the vehicle came out on the more gentle slopes where the road straightened out toward the bottom of the valley. The salesman drew a now cramped hand across his perspiring forehead and sighed with re-

lief. Now he could see the luscious fields below and inhale the fragrance of the resinous forest, through which, unmindful, he had just passed, and hear the music of the waters from the stream which, at this point, crossed the highway. The countryman stopped his horse and got out to release the rein that the animal might drink.

That's the old Howe place, right over yander, he said, indicating the squat farmhouse among the willows. Most of this here water comes from the Howe spring. Mighty good water, too, but a feller'd hate to live there.

Not much of a farm, eh?

Well, hit mought have been, as the sayin' is, but it haint. But there's more than that ailin'. The countryman bit off an end of twist tobacco, readjusted the rein, and clambered once more into the vehicle.

The place had been going from bad to worse ever since the Civil War, he explained. Old John-of-All, as the first Howe in North Georgia Appalachia was called, had come down from Virginia, purchased most of the

valley, erected in the midst of his plantation a noble house, and had lived like the gentleman he was. But, due to a fiery temper, he had made enemies; when the war came, and he had gone forth in command of a regiment, these took advantage of his absence to wreak petty vengeance. At last the valley came to be a passage way for both armies, and they lent impartial assistance to the demolition that the thieves had begun. Then the colonel had come home on sick leave, and during the days of his convalescence, had frequented his wine cellar all too faithfully. One afternoon, when Howe was sleeping noisily, under the influence of potent brandies, a company of Yankees was sighted, and his excited wife had rushed into the library and besought her husband to hide.

Am I a dog to be intimidated by a handful of cowardly Yankees? he had returned, buckling on his sword; and without paying heed to his wife's tearful entreaties, or the protests of the terrified negroes, he had staggered out to the gateway, brandishing sword and pistol, and commanded the enemy

to halt. Two days later his riddled body had been committed to the earth. Right over yander 'mongst them cedars, said the countryman, pointing with his whip. The old colonel had left two sons and a daughter. The younger son went West soon after the war, and to George had fallen the care of the estate. Later his sister had married a Republican, and—right then and there, trouble started; law suits over land, over boundary fences; quarrels, and even blows. One night George's house was burned, and the inmates had had scant time to escape from the flames. Very little had been saved. And then after that:

George had lived in that old ramshackle place that we jist passed; ust to be the overseer's house. He went and married old man Dill's gal, Lizzie, and about all he did for a livin' was to sell off land. The rest of the time he set around a readin', and a learnin' them two triflin' boys of hisn. It didn't do 'em no good, neither, fer little George, he ups and gits kilt before he was growed; got in a fracas with Dave Miller, his own cousin,

onct removed. Jawn's all thet's left now, and he don't amount to much. Clever sort of feller, too, always projeckin' around with notions. Doesn't take no care of the place, except to fool around with some of the cows and calves and one ole hawse. I heerd thet he did try to git the school over at Potter's Corner, but ole man Miller seen to it thet he didn't have no chanct to put fool notions into his gran' chilluns' heads. An', d'ye know, a while back that young fool up an' fell in love with Frances, the ole man's youngest gal, an' her his cousin, an' in the face an' eyes of all the trouble thet's been goin' on for over thirty years. Ole Miller ordered him off with his shotgun. But even then he might hev got the gal in spite of hell an' high water, as the sayin' is, but he goes roun' talkin' about her paw, and Frances gets plum mad and gives him the mittin. . . . I reckon they ain't more'n a hundred dollars twixt him an' the porehouse. An' they do say that ole colonel Jawn, while he was home on thet furlough, buried a lot a' money some'eres, but nobody never found nothin'. . . ."

2

This John Howe was a queer person, and given to strange fancies. Uncanny it was to hear him going on with fine words addressed to the very air, and no one, so far as he knew, around. Indeed it seemed that when no person was about, John was most sure of his company, and would make speeches to the trees and stones, that no sensible soul could make head or tail of. At everything that happened he seemed to grow worse. It hadn't been so bad when his father had been alive, and the two would moon and talk together by day, and read mad things about Themistocles and Romulus by lamplight. Yet even then, on days when they would go out to plow the field, one would fall to telling about a thing that happened once upon a time, and the other would question; and before a furrow had been turned, a book must be fetched; and sundown would bring the supper-bell and no work done. Old George would say: Look here, you haven't done a lick, to which John would answer: I'll do it tomorrow. But,

tomorrow—it was the same. Forever he was dreaming his time away instead of dunging the fields.

After old George had been planted in the earth at the foot of the cedars, John and his mother had been more remote than ever, and went around with big eyes that seemed to make no more of looking through mortals than if they were made of clear glass. They made folk uncomfortable, which was not fortunate, seeing that, what with feuds and quarrels in the family, their friends could be counted upon the fingers of one hand. And now John was quite alone, and spoke more than ever to the fireplace and the stars. And he was unreasonable with practical people who tried to set him about his business. No wonder that his blue-eyed girl would have none of him and his tears, his poems and his high talk. He was alone. Even the old blind mare had left him; had died in the stall without touching the bran pudding that her master had so carefully prepared for her toothless pleasure. The old mare had been something to love and to talk to, and she had

seemed to understand. John Howe was alone.

3

And yet it seemed sometimes that he was surrounded by a shadowy throng of companions who responded to the instant's whim, and betimes moved him to laughter; and they led him into the forests on strange quests, and filled him with disquieting hungers. Perhaps it was this leading, or only the romanticism of youth, that had caused him, as a boy, to search the mountain sides for the buried treasure of old John. It could not have been greed, for he was glad when each successive exploration proved fruitless: It leaves something to seek for, he said.

So, you see, John Howe was nothing of a realist and was uncursed with common sense. To him, even at thirty, the world was yet a wonder, and life a riddle that would ever be unguessed, and each day a miracle over whose horizon hung a quivering curtain, behind which was the Great Mystery. And yet, life had a way of dealing hardly with him, and

those he had loved had been taken away, and the things he cherished had crumbled beneath his fingers. And, being flesh, he yearned for the reassuring touch of a friendly hand and the sound of a gentle human voice.

And thus it came about that John was resolved to set forth into the world, to find if haply there might be somewhat to rid him of the plague of loneliness that clutched at his heart, and to purge his soul of bitter remembrance. For he was schooled in no philosophy other than could be found in the pages of Homer and Virgil, Malory and Rabelais, the Testament and Hymnal; he had never journeyed further than Potter's Corner, or along the crest of Egypt's Mountain; hence he knew nothing of the sage observations that had been made by the sophisticated concerning travel and its vanities,—and he was persuaded that somewhere beyond the horizon was the abode of Beauty.

On a day in the early spring, then, having already disposed of his spotted cow and two yearlings for much less than they were worth,—the purchaser having been none other than

Elder Potter himself,—he did up a parcel of such belongings as, in his simplicity, he deemed needful; and, wrapping them in the heavy folds of an old army blanket, prepared to leave his home. He took no precautions concerning the house other than to latch the single front door,—for he was an honest man and attributed no baser fault to his neighbors than the occasional desire to commit murder. True, he reflected, moth and rust would corrupt to some extent, but the only real thieves who would wish to break through and steal were mice and rats, and they could not for that there remained on guard wry-faced old Lamentations, the tortoise-shelled cat, whose scriptural appellation had been conferred by reason of his pessimistic nocturnal song.

Lamentations was not affectionate and had not endeared himself to John, as was the way with other animals, but he was a sworn enemy to rodents, and was, thereby, more self-sustaining than most of the human inhabitants along the mountain side. He effected entrance to the house through a broken window,

and John was frequently awakened in the dead of night by a squeak and growl, and sat up to behold two gleaming eyes in a corner of the dark room. From the cedar chest of bedding and the inlaid highboy—the only household things which held a place in John's esteem—Lamentations would drive the furry enemies of property, and all would be safe. The other treasures of the family John had already placed in his ample pockets; the key-winding gold watch, which had belonged to old John-of-All, now bulged out on his waistcoat. It was the size of a fat, southern soda biscuit, and would not run; but, since time has a way of passing, willy-nilly, a correct timepiece is of no great consequence to an idealist. John's coat was bulging also: one pocket contained an ancient copy of *The Booke of Common Prayer and the Psalmes of David*; the other, for the sake of balance, holding the first volume of *The Works of Dr. Francis Rabelais*. In the hip pocket of the gray jeans trousers was a flask of brandy, much esteemed in those parts as a remedy for divers plagues. He had thought of taking

another flask against the time of need, but he feared that it might prove cumbersome, and besides, being a friendly soul, he expected to meet with hospitality along the way; and what was hospitality if it did not include a good drink?

Perhaps a similar course of reasoning had led him to take no more provisions than a generous slab of dried beef and two loaves of home-baked bread; people would be kind. But what matter if they weren't? He had all of forty dollars tucked away in the lining of his vest, to say nothing of two capable arms to work with, if worst came to worst. Strapping the bundle across his shoulders, John Howe walked slowly away from the forlorn place among the willows and turned his face toward the west.

There was a footpath that trailed along the base of the mountain, leading through thickets of sumac and wild honeysuckle, beyond Bryant's Gap; and beyond there, he knew not whither it led, save that it led beyond. And if his heart yearned a little when he paused at the corner of the barn to

take one last look at the bare remnant of his grandfather's plantation; if there was a catch at his throat when his eyes rested momentarily upon the cedars where his loved-ones lay, it mattered not, for his hopes comforted him. And beyond the immediate hills was a fair dream-place where spires glittered with gold, and were the symbols of gladness and of the incommunicable joys of those who seek for the great mystery; beyond the blue mountains, whose tops were lost in the mist, were still and untroubled waters where there might be love and haply, also, peace.

CHAPTER III

THE CHRONICLE OF THE SHINING SKULL

I



NOW after many days of wandering, during which John had crossed and re-crossed ragged mountains and raging streams, and had sometimes lost his way, he came out upon a curious country where there were no mountains at all, and where a road ran straight across faintly wrinkled fields of broom sage, and where there were pawpaw bushes and clumps of small pine. And at first he had rejoiced because the going was made easy, but by and by the level lands made him weary by their sameness, and he hastened his footsteps that he might pass beyond. A little time after that he was gladdened by the sight of a forest where there were great poplars and gum trees and the

white trunks of the sycamore. And within the forest he discovered a path that led off the highway, and seeing that it curved about and was not all visible at a single glance, he took hope and followed it until at last he came upon a clearing, in the center of which was a cabin of logs, chinked with mud and stones; and nearby was a spring of pure water.

Hello, he cried. Hello!

But there came no answer, save that the echo seemed to end in a hollow moan.

Now that is strange, he observed, but seeing that there is no one either to invite or hinder me, I may as well make free to drink of this water and break bread by the side of this brook, and perchance the owner may presently return. With that he unloosed the straps about his shoulders and lay down to drink. But no sooner had his lips touched the surface of the limpid waters than his ears were assailed by a most alarming groan. Startled by the sound, he arose and looked about him. There was the cabin just as before, with its door shut and its sliding window closed; the clearing, save for its growth of

weeds and rank grass and a single thorn bush, was empty; among the trees round about he could descry no human form.

I must be nervous, he observed aloud, and once more lay down to the cooling water. This time, although there came another sound, very like a human sigh, he drank his fill. And after he had refreshed himself with a taste of brandy and such food as was stored away in his roll of blankets, he went up to the cabin and knocked. Again there was no answer, so, pulling the blackened leather latchstring, he opened the door and entered.

A smell of decayed wood and ashes pervaded the place and, at first glance, the room seemed utterly bare. But as Howe's eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness, he discovered a small table and a crude split-bottomed chair in one corner, while in another was a white thing lying sprawled out on the floor. Somehow the sight of this object made prickles run along his spine, and he was minded to turn and fly, but recalling an old prayer that his father had taught him he muttered: *Ne reminiscaris, Domine, delicta*

nostra, and, taking courage, stepped forward to make out what the thing could be. And there, in the uncanny slanting light that was turned into pale green by the leaves of the forest, he saw that he was alone with a headless human skeleton.

Ah, well, said John, after the first fright was over, and he had collected his wits, this is not so bad as it might have been. The fellow is obviously dead, and therefore not quarrelsome, treacherous, nor immoral; and, having no head, can wish me no harm. I may as well set about getting wood for a fire and abide here for a time. By day I can catch fish from yonder stream and write poems at this table; by night I will have shelter and the companionship of these dry bones. Then suddenly he was brought up by a horrible thought. A flush mounted to his cheeks. Perhaps this was the skeleton of a woman! John Howe was a respectable man, and could not bear the thought of the least irregularity of conduct. If this should prove to be the skeleton of a woman, he could by no means remain, even a single night, nor for all his

weariness. It was revolting, impossible. Hastily he bent over and counted the ribs. How many ribs did a woman have? That she should have one more than a man, he knew well enough from his familiarity with Genesis. But how many ribs should a man have? That was the problem. Also he had heard of floating ribs; perhaps one had floated away. It was very perplexing, and until the matter was thoroughly settled, it was clear that one of them must sleep outside. But which one? The skeleton had a prior claim to such comforts as the cabin might afford, and it seemed an ungracious thing to hustle it out by superior force. On the other hand, he was alive and would relish more the warmth of a fire and the protection of a friendly roof. At all events, he would build the fire; and perhaps the flames would throw some light upon a delicate ethical puzzle that, just now, bade fair to destroy his peace of mind.

While he was fetching a third armload of boughs and pine knots for the stone hearth, there came yet another groan that seemed to

make even the sills of the rough floor to quake and tremble. John looked accusingly, and, withal, in some consternation towards the skeleton, but it had not moved a finger; indeed, the sound had seemed to come from somewhere without.

I reckon I had better look around, said John, rather reluctantly. It may be that some poor soul is in trouble. But by this time a thick darkness had fallen upon the wood, and the deep shadows were weird enough in all conscience, and the murmur of the brook was now like whispers about a sepulchre; so that it was no wonder that he stopped with one foot beyond the doorsill, and that he kept one hand upon the latch-string.

Hello! he cried, and his voice quavered like that of the music teacher who sang solos at Potter's Corner chapel. Again there was no answer, but as he peered into the gloom, he beheld something like a huge glow-worm, and the thing seemed to be in the very center of the thorn bush which stood out in front of the cabin.

I reckon I ought to have a look at that, he

ventured a bit uncertainly. I reckon I ought, he repeated, with a questioning air, turning to the outstretched skeleton, as if for confirmation or courage. So saying, he picked up a stout stick in one hand and advanced cautiously toward the bush. For, after all, he reflected, if he could abide a ghastly skeleton, he should have no dread of a mere glow-worm, however large it might be. But when he drew near the bush, the glow worm seemed to resolve itself into the outline of a fiery human skull, and he stopped short and lifted up the cudgel.

Well, sir, are you going to stand there all night? The words seemed to come from the heart of the bush, and the voice was that of one whose teeth rattle together from a chill.

John lowered his hand to his side and dropped the stick to the ground.

Where are you, and what do you want? he asked, swallowing hard at a lumpy object which had just now risen into his throat.

Right here in front of you, in the middle of this damned thorn-bush, said the skull, glowing more fiercely than ever. And I want to

get myself together, so to speak. In the old days I was always attached to myself.

That seems very reasonable, John replied, but do you, er—belong inside?

My connections are within that cabin yonder, said the skull with as much dignity as, under the circumstances, it could muster. And I should be greatly obliged if you would assist me to resume a more intimate relationship.

Certainly, John assented, and with that he, somewhat gingerly, it must be confessed, thrust his hand into the midst of the thorn bush, and, after several attempts and a bit of very excusable profanity, drew forth the shining skull.

You throw out a considerable light, John observed, by way of making amends for the momentary violence of his language.

I was always intellectual, said the skull.

But why . . . ?

I refuse to answer any more questions until I am put where I belong, interrupted the skull with great firmness.

And I shan't close the door until I am

satisfied about an extremely important matter, said John, as he neared the recumbent skeleton.

Just push a little harder please; that's it, dear me! cried the skull, with a grimace, as John twisted it into place.

Does that feel natural? John inquired as he rose from his labors.

Natural as life, thank you; now I can sleep.

Hold on! Don't you dare go to sleep until I am satisfied about . . .

What's that?

John blushed furiously. Are you, that is, were you, a man, or a woman? he finally managed to stammer.

Oh hell! said the skull, shutting its teeth tightly together.

That settles it, cried John, in great relief. No woman could have said it with such exquisite feeling.

And with this mighty sex problem put away, he wrapped himself round with blankets and lay down to a well-earned sleep of innocence and purity.

2

The days went by, even as John Howe had purposed when first he sat by the springside, and he now fished for horny-heads and red-eye, and perch, which he broiled over the glowing coals; or he sat by the awkward table and wrote even more awkward verse addressed to the Frances who, after a season of passionate avowal, had, in such quick obedience, taken the oath of renunciation. And this verse was full of Amaryllises and Chloes, of daffodils and daisies. There were faint intimations of Herrick and horrible parodies of Poe; but the act of setting them down eased his soul of its weight of bitterness.

But the skeleton troubled him. During the first days it slept and behaved as every decent skeleton should, and when twilight fell it was a great convenience to be able to write by its phosphorescent glow; now, particularly during those seasons of labor when he would be beating his brow to complete what promised to be a beautiful thought, or when he would be seeking for a fine word to rhyme

with sequestered, or Pan, the skeleton would interrupt with a giggle:

Why do you waste your time, young man? Go out and make love to a pretty girl. Poetry is a mere outlet for pain, and avails nothing—mere pretty froth and foam. Far better it is to cultivate the fields. Besides, you are not a poet.

I fear that is true, said John, but how did you learn so much, and why are you so bitter?

I was a critic, and I laid waste a volume of verse every day. I became quite famous. And, speaking as a critic, let me suggest that, instead of writing mediocre verse, you might become a novelist. It is much easier, and far more profitable.

Impossible, declared John. Poetry is written to please yourself, but in novels, from all I hear, you have to please everybody. I couldn't do it.

Ah, cried the skull, that is where I can help you. I have long thought of a method whereby any writer of fiction might achieve universal popularity. It is called—

THE NOVEL OF SPARE PARTS.

The manufacturers conceived of the notion for farm machinery; I apply it to literature. First off, you write the nucleus of an ordinary story with a group of well defined characters, and some entertaining descriptions. You sell that, bound in expandable covers—loose leaf, I believe it is called. In the back you advertise your spare parts: parts for those who want more love, less love, stronger characterization, and the like. There are spare part endings: for those who admire Russian fiction, a part beginning in epilepsy, and concluding in wholesale suicide; for those who prefer the strictly American style, the hero's shoulders can be broadened in accordance with the prevailing mode of tailoring, the heroine made into a model of homely virtue, and the curtain rung down on a scene of sudden wealth and pious maxims; while for those who have been depraved by French letters, you can issue a privately printed and strictly limited part at an advanced price. Furthermore, you can have sections to please all denominations, and all faiths,—Protestant and Catholic, skeptic and Jew; Southern

Democrat and New England Republican, so that no man in the whole world need go unsatisfied. It is a tremendous idea. The skeleton's jaw's fairly rattled.

Then the skeleton would grow reminiscent, and tell of his love affairs and of the days when he was a soldier. . . .

And I had a gay time then on the days I wasn't fighting.

Were you patriotic?

Ah yes, immensely so. And then it happened that at that time I was pestered by a troublesome wife, so that I went into the army for relief. Soldiering was quite pleasant.

Did you believe in the cause for which you fought?

I never thought about it; I was a gentleman and I did what was expected of a gentleman, replied the skeleton in frosty accents.

And was the world made better by all the fighting?

Why, Sir, if I were clothed in flesh I would challenge you to a duel. You are a scoundrel!

Better indeed! What do you suppose wars are fought for!

I don't know why the devil you get so excited and call me strange names, said John. I merely wished to know your opinion and what you thought. . . .

People have no right to think about such matters; I never had an opinion. As I remarked before, I was a gentleman and a Christian. The skeleton was so wrought up that its teeth nearly fell out of their sockets.

But you had a decided opinion about poetry just now.

Poetry is a different matter; personal, and at the same time vague. It is of no consequence. The more obscure and metaphysical a thing is, the more right we have to discuss it. There is music for example: every man has the right to discuss an opera, because none may say what is the meaning. Or, again, the merest tyro has a right to discuss God or the soul, offhand. What difference does it make? But concerning a particular war, or why it is fought, is no man's business but that of the government.

No doubt you are quite right, John agreed, anxious to change the subject as quickly as possible, but what became of your wife.

Alas, she survived and was waiting for me when I returned. Poor creature, I was obliged to choke her to death for her faithfulness.

Then it is you who are the scoundrel! cried John Howe, leaping to his feet and looking around for a weapon.

Hoity-toity, sneered the other, don't forget that I am already dead. The woman wearied me with her everlasting Dears and Darlings and her dog-like patience. The skeleton sighed. But life got even with me. . . . I married again.

Yes?

And the next woman talked my head off. . . .

Served you right! Served you right! You got what you deserved, and I am glad to have discovered the reason for the embarrassing predicament in which I found you.

Who knows what we deserve, said the skeleton. We are what the forces in and

around us have determined, and that is all we know.

There is something in what you say, agreed John. Here am I, a peace-loving mortal, driven to unhappiness because of the quarrels of my father and of the generations that went before me. For that others have made turmoil, I must suffer.

But the bones on the floor would have none of it. It is true that others made the turmoil, but you suffer because you are flesh.

Rather, because I have reason.

Perhaps because you are self-conscious.

Reason does make a deal of trouble, said John. I recollect a meeting at the chapel when old Jerry Gray got up in his pew and told Elder Potter that he and his family were bound for hell fire because none of them had been immersed, and that unless all of them were buried with the Lord in baptism, they were sure to perish. Then Potter sprang to his feet, foaming with rage, and said that it was Jerry who was surely doomed to burn in flame, since he had not gone to the mourner's bench and had not received the witness of the

Spirit. Aunt Em' Wilson pulled him down and declared that they were both hard-headed old fools, who would get to Heaven in spite of themselves and through the mercy of the Lord. Then she started to sing a hymn and that ended it.

Emotion is more to be trusted than reason, observed the bones. Now I was saved by an intoxicated prostitute. . . .

You never were saved, snapped John, and I am sorry now that I didn't leave you in the thorn bush where your wife talked you.

In fact the skeleton was growing more of a bore every day, and made life a burden to John. How could a man write poetry and dream dreams, and seek to know the beautiful when he was constantly interrupted by a scandal-mongering creature who dragged about a horrible past and blotted out all hope of the future with his insinuations of evil? The thing was making him bitter, and he was determined to be rid of it and set about his journey. So once more he rolled his blankets into a pack and prepared to take leave.

I knew you would tire of me, in spite of

all my merry chatter. Poets will never pay heed to the critics, and youth will not hearken to wisdom, sighed the skeleton.

I am more than tired of you; I detest you. I am going out to discover the mystery and the joy of life.

Let me tell you, then, that the world you seek, the universe you wish to explore, the mystery you long to know, are all housed in your own skull.

Ha! said John. That is indeed a cheerful observation, seeing that less than an hour since I saw a rat emerge from your left eye socket. But I am going to leave you, nevertheless, a token of my esteem. He snatched from the table a handful of papers, scrawled over with pencil marks and smeared with many erasures. Here, then, are the verses which you laughed at and spoiled in the making. I should, perhaps, have saved these papers for a more useful purpose, but I suppose that I owe you something. And with that John stuffed the ball of poems into the gaping jaw.

Farewell! he shouted.

But the horrified skull could not speak.

CHAPTER IV

A CURIOUS TRINITY OF MISFITS

I



SEENING that John Howe travelled no certain road, and that he was guided by no other than the setting sun, his way led him by strange places and he met with singular adventures. The things he saw would have seemed quite ordinary, no doubt, to one who had spent his days in Kansas City or Boston, but to one who had lived always at the foot of the mountains, and had seen no more of urban excitement and pomp than could be witnessed at the general store of Potter's Corner, it was all very alarming.

The one or two novels whose pages he had turned bore witness to the wonder of towns and cities, and told, in a most convincing

manner, of their superior ways and their larger wisdom. And, indeed, the towns were amazing. Confusing it was to find one's way along bewildering streets, among such multitudes of jostling people and clanging trolley-cars, whilst all the time one's eyes were roving up the sides of great houses and seeking out the meaning of each new mystery as it came. And confounding it was to behold the inhabitants of these towns pass their great churches without so much as turning their heads, and with a more stolid indifference than that of a yokel digging in a patch of turnips. John Howe followed the men into brawling bar rooms where the stench of stale beer almost overpowered him, and where those who took liquors poured them down as though driven by some demon of duty. And he saw young women and their lovers enter gaudy places where they sat at marble tables and thrust straws into pink froth, and come forth chewing frantically on a substance that smacked and cracked with the sound of a taffy pulling. But in their eyes he saw no signs of hunger for that which is neither visible nor

concrete. Everywhere he was told to Keep off the grass, and to Move along, and the voices were tart and sharp, and the words were ungracious and cold. Yet behind the things he saw and the words he heard he thought he discerned something more, and he was sure every place had its presiding genius, and that there would be strangeness enough if one knew how to look for it.

But it isn't for me to abide in such places, he said. Truth to say, he expressed these sentiments, and more, to an agent of real estate who followed him about in a certain city, and was so persistent that he could not by any means shake him off. John had left his bundle at a small hotel and had gone about looking at the gold fish in a marble fountain, and at the children playing in a great amusement park; and when he was weary of these, and would have turned back to the hostelry, ready to resume his journey, a grinning, bowing man had greeted him, and, after inquiring whether he were a stranger, thrust upon him a card which, in letters of red, set forth that this town was the healthiest spot on earth, and that

its waters contained more healing salts, its air more balm, its climate more tonic power, and its population more Christian gentlemen than any other place whatever. The truly miraculous part of it was that, despite these manifest advantages, city lots were to be had for next to nothing, if one bought at once; and that the Bonanza Realty Co. could sell for less than any other agency in this wonder town.

Thank you, but I do not want to live here, said John calmly, returning the card.

Think of the opportunities! cried the agent.

For what?

Why, for settling here; for getting work, and for enjoying our advantages.

What advantages?

Look at our new post-office; our six splendid national banks; our fifty miles of paved streets . . .

But, my dear sir, what are these things to me? I wish to travel.

A rolling stone gathers . . .

No slugs, John finished, hastening his steps.

But, see here, you are from the country, young man, and we have much to offer you.

Our daily press is here at hand giving you the news of the whole world, and in that public library . . .

All the good books are under lock and key, and the rest are so much confusion.

But you will never again have such a chance to make money; and I want you to see your own interest. . . .

By this time they had come to a quiet spot where an iron bridge spanned a little river, and here, John's patience being exhausted, he cried out:

Now I will see to my interest, and I will let you taste full well of these pure and healing waters that you have praised! And seizing the wretched man by the scruff of his neck, John tossed him into the midst of the stream.

That, now, was an act of purification, and in its way, a kindness, said John to himself as he turned towards the hotel. If the man drowns, I reckon it will be because he has neglected the art of swimming; and if he has done that, it may be taken as a sure indication that the Lord had already ordained his death, and had

appointed me his humble agent. In any event, the man was annoying and of little consequence. But looking back at the river he saw that its waters had now become foul, and that the stream was choked utterly.

2

For miles the highway had been covered with a mantle of dust which rose in little clouds at every footfall, and the sun beat down upon his back without mercy. And over the fields the heat danced in quivering waves, and the grass beneath was parched and seared, and the whole earth was a furnace. John Howe walked with his head bent low; his eyes were red from the glowing light, and his tongue was dry and cracked. But presently, coming to higher ground, he felt the touch of a cooling breeze, and, looking ahead, he saw the shimmering surface of a water pool, bordered by a strip of grass, green as emerald; and he breathed a prayer of thankfulness, and hastened forward, and, kneeling down upon the turf at the water's edge, he drank his fill.

And now that he was refreshed, he gave a sigh of satisfaction.

That only goes to show, he said, that our pleasures are dependent upon a little suffering. The dark shadows of the tree would yield no joy without the discomfort of the noon day sun, and the lover's touch would be bare of meaning had there not been hours of loneliness and aching solitude.

He had addressed this speech to a little cloud that floated over the western rim of the world, and when he looked down once more he gave a start of surprise; for the pool of water was gone, leaving only a carpet of dry grass and round stones. But when he searched about him he saw that the pool had moved across the plain, and was far off; and he could see the shadows of green trees in the water, and the green border at the water's edge, so that he knew that he had been drinking from a mirage.

The idealists are right, he observed to a panting lizard, which peeped out from a tuft of brown grass. If waters of fancy can quench a man's thirst, why bother with the facts?

Now when the shadows grew long and the sun was dipping down into the horizon, John drew near to a real stream, whose sound was music to the ears. There was a clump of trees, and the moss-covered wheel of an ancient mill. And above the tree tops he saw a thin line of white smoke winding upwards towards the sky. And beneath the tree were two men, seated by the side of a little fire; and from a blackened pot issued the fragrant steam of coffee.

Good evening! said John.

Come and join us, cried the men.

Ah, that is a welcome I appreciate, gentlemen, John said. They are the first really cordial words I have heard since I left the mountains.

3

On the following morning, when the dawn was come, the three men bestirred themselves about a simple breakfast, and when they had eaten and lighted their pipes the eldest of them, a tall dark man with a great head of

black hair, prematurely silvered about the temples, rose and said:

Stranger, we are happy to have welcomed you to our company for the night, and to have found you a courteous gentleman rather than the usual vagabond one meets on the road; but seeing now that we seem bent on the same direction, it might be well for us to know more of one another, and then determine whether the two of us should continue as we have for some months, together, and you alone; or whether our objects and way of life be such as to warrant, let us say, the forming of a larger corporation.

My name is John Howe, if that is what you wish to know, said John, a little puzzled by this elaborate speech, and I come from the mountains of North Georgia. I have a farm there, but no friends to hold me, and I am traveling that I may learn something of life and find peace and happiness.

Quite wonderful! said the tall man, I am delighted to know such an idealist. My name is Tessaract, David Tessaract, and I have no object whatever, other than to satisfy my

curiosity. This is my friend, Mr. Aliment, to whose more practical resources I have been indebted more than once.

Pleased to meetya, said Mr. Aliment, who seemed to derive great amusement from his companions' formality. About all I'm out for is to be outdoors, and to look after the Doctor here. Aliment was a short, heavily built man of, perhaps, forty, whose abundant good nature was written in every curve of his double chin. John noticed that both of these men sounded their R's in an outlandish way that indicated a Yankee origin.

Are you a Doctor? he inquired, turning to Tessaract.

Of philosophy, not medicine, he replied. I had the honor of receiving my doctorate from Harvard, and, having mentioned the fact to my friend here, he insists on always making it known.

What's the use of being a doctor if nobody knows it? said Aliment. We get respectful treatment everywhere just as soon as people hear his title.

My friend Aliment is a utilitarian, ex-

plained Mr. Tessaract with a sad grimace, and his philosophy, though just as fallacious, is more practical and popular than your own.

I don't quite understand your words, said John but I gather that you have discovered truth.

No, my friend, far from it, but I am a skeptic. John shivered and breathed a prayer for the man's soul.

. . . and my task it is to question all beliefs whatsoever. You see, every philosophy is untrue, and the only truth is the universality of falsehood.

But religion . . .

I was afraid you would think of that. My skepticism has nothing whatever to do with religion. That is a distinct realm into which reason does not, or should not, enter.

I am glad to hear that, said John. I think we can get along pretty well. I don't know any philosophy other than *quod cibus est alliis, alliis est atre venenum*—what is one man's meat is another man's poison; and, although I had not before thought of having company, it must be admitted that traveling

makes a man lonesome, especially in the cities.

We are henceforth inseparable! cried Tesseract, holding out his hand.

John was flattered by such generous enthusiasm.

But can, or rather will you work, if need be? inquired Mr. Aliment, who was ever careful of practical details.

When work does not interfere with a man's ideas, it has its uses, John admitted, and I can turn my hand to a plow, or wield a good ax, if these services are a means to some happy end.

An honest word, and very moderately put, I think, Aliment conceded. For my part, I hate to hear fellows brag about how they love to work from mornin' until night. There is somethin' suspicious about it to my notion. He hesitated for a moment:

What the Doctor really wanted to say, if he hadn't been too polite, was that we are honest men and don't aim to do any mischief; and we don't aim to go about with anybody who is looking to make trouble. We are ready enough to tell who we are, and expect the same of anybody we pick up with. After

this blunt speech, Mr. Aliment dipped his pipe into the hot ashes for a fresh coal and sat back expectantly.

John Howe, it must be noted, flushed a bit at having such a strange questioning of his probity, and his nostrils might have been noticed to contract and expand with some tenseness. But he was minded of the fact that while his honesty had been taken for granted in his homeland, he was now among strangers; and, considering what he had seen in the towns along the way, it was no wonder that people should be particular. So, restraining his first indignant impulse, he began to tell of his life in the mountains: of the passing of his loved ones; of his fallen estates; of how his father had read to him, and had told him of the nobler deeds of olden days. He told them also the legends of weird caves that were hollowed out in the mountain sides; of the Indian maids who came at dusk during the new moon to visit the ghostly haunts of their lovers; and of the scarlet birds that were the harbingers of woe. And because the men before him sat in sympathetic silence, he poured

out the tale of his love for the maid who lived back in the hills among the whispering pines and tulip trees, and of how they would go out in the spring time to gather branches of azalea and red bud, and of how they had spoken together in the orchards when the peaches were in bloom. All in all, his story was more a revelation of his hungers than a chronicle of his days.

And Tessaract, as he listened to the eager words, pondered upon the futility of teaching people exact science, or of creating within them a passion for the clear, cold outlines of philosophic truth.

As for Mr. Aliment, that worthy man was of two minds. John's words were too extravagant for his comprehension, and his visions were too fantastic to be fitted into the world of his experience; he was willing, however, to give a man the benefit of the doubt, and he was assured of his innocence. Harmless! he whispered under his breath.

You are even more of an idealist than I had guessed, said the philosopher when John had left off, and I am more convinced than before

that we need just such a traveling companion, in order that we may keep alive our spirits. But out of fairness to you, I must also make myself known.

Tessaract wrapped his long fingers about his knees, leaned his head against the bole of the great poplar tree and gazed up at the rotting mill wheel.

To begin with, you must be informed that I have but recently effected my escape from an institution for the insane, he explained in the listless tones of one who has just announced his return from a morning walk.

Because of your skepticism? John inquired; for, to his notion, that alone was a sufficient ground for incarceration.

Let him tell it, Aliment put in with some severity.

For telling people the exact truth, for being logical, and for having discovered a philosophic system at variance with existing academic thought. My father was a wealthy business man, and had high hopes for my future. He first began to suspect me when he found that I was taking honors in all my

classes. It seemed abnormal to him, ungentlemanly and even unsportsmanlike. Learning as a decoration, or a means of getting on in the world, was an accepted thing; but a passion for learning was a perversion. Then, when I insisted upon three years graduate work, instead of remaining in Europe, where he had sent me after my undergraduate days, he began to be angry. And when, after I had secured my doctorate, I published a book on *The Dimensional Psychology of Micro-organisms*, and was just ready to enter upon the development of my revolutionary philosophy, Father determined that I should be locked up. He had made his fortune out of sanitary plumbing, and could not understand why I had no wish to carry on his business. My work, he would say, combines beauty with service. What can be more lovely than pure, white toilet basins? What can be more noble than the humble offices they perform?

I told him that he had made enough money to enable me to live comfortably and to publish my philosophical books. Then he put

me away into a private asylum. Fortune, however, was with me, and by hypnotizing one of the keepers, I was able to effect my escape with something more than two hundred dollars in my pockets—removed from a keeper, who could collect from my father if he wished. A few months since I was lucky enough to fall in with my good friend, Aliment here, and, both of us, having an aversion to crowded cities, have been touring through the waste places and enjoying the beneficence of nature,—at least I have. Aliment may speak for himself.

Tessaract's vocabulary was rather difficult for John Howe, who, though far more learned than his fellow citizens, had read scarcely more than a dozen books, and, since some of these were in Latin and none of them were scientific, he could by no means imagine what hypnotize or micro-organism signified. While he was turning these things over in his mind, Aliment began his recital.

Well, I haven't got much to say for myself, Mr. Howe. I was born up in Illinoy, and my folks lived on a farm. Pa got up before

sunrise and never come in till dark. Ma worked with the chickens and the dairy, the cookin' 'n sewin' 'n mendin'; and sometimes on Sundays she would play the organ and sing. Her fingers got too stiff for that in later years. The old folks spent pretty nearly all they had in educatin' my brother Thomas to be a preacher; but he went into some kind of a society,—Purity I think they called it,—and got hurt. I was too young to know much about it, but I heard 'em talkin' about some kind of a secret vise—I guess he was a machine-inventor. Anyway, it took all the rest of the money, and the place had to be mortgaged. The last I heard of Tom he was at a place called Sing Song, or somethin' like that, and Pa never could bear to hear the word, Purity, again. Said it always reminded him of somethin' nasty. So that's how I come not to have much education. The old folks died pretty soon, and I have been roamin' about from one place to another. I always work my way, and as long as I have enough to eat and wear, and a place to sleep in the winter time,

I'm not complainin'. In warm weather I would rather stay out where I can breathe. It don't take much to live, for a man like me. Apart from gettin' a few dollars, all I try to do is to be honest, and not to make trouble unless people get in my road and act up. Mr. Aliment rose to his feet.

That's all I've got to say, Howe; if agreeable to the Doctor, you're agreeable to me.

I'm sure, said John, that you have both been very clever to me, and seeing that we have all had sorrows enough to make us sympathetic, I shall be only too glad to go along with you.

Splendid! cried Mr. Tessaract, we shall fare nobly together, and you shall hear my outline of philosophy, and we will listen to your poems.

And I suppose I'll have to forage for firewood and grub, Aliment put in.

The practical man insists on realism, Tessaract observed, with a reproving shake of his head. But just you wait till I've perfected my scheme for the psychic control of industry

and politics, and none of us will need to fret about these sordid affairs.

I reckon, said John, tugging at his hip pocket, that this is a good time to pass around a drink.

CHAPTER V

WILD WOMEN AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

I



HEY had come to the banks of a wide river whose turbid green waters glided southward with the sibilant hiss of a mighty serpent. Driftwood and old boxes lined the muddy banks, and now and then the dead and swollen body of an animal would float by. For hours the trio had followed the stream hoping to reach the ferry to which a countryman had directed them. The air was still and oppressive and, over in the west, purple-black clouds rolled up like smoke from a chimney stack.

If we don't get to that ferry place pretty soon we're in for a wettin', prophesied Alimment.

Who cares? John challenged. I like storms

myself. The rumble of thunder and the fine flashes of lightning make you think of the pagan gods and all the grand capers they used to cut. As for getting wet, I've hunted possums all night in the rain.

That does very well when you are young and foolish, but when you get as old as I am you begin to think about your bones, Aliment returned.

Rain is the weeping of goddesses who have been forsaken by their lovers; raindrops are jewels that . . .

Rain, Mr. Aliment broke in, means either crops and prosperity, or floods and rheumatism.

I've been thinking, said Mr. Tessaract, who had been walking in quiet meditation for some time, of how like this river is to human society: the drops of water, as they fall from the clouds, are clean and pure; they are to be compared to the little cells from which we grow. They sink into the earth and become impregnated with their several salts and, finally, emerge in clear springs, each having an individuality. But the forces carry them

along to larger and larger streams, each dirtier than the other, until they come to such a filthy, stinking stream as this, bearing sewage and corruption. The great river is democracy, and it travels toward the ocean which is death.

But there is a resurrection, John insisted.

Yes, there is a resurrection, admitted the philosopher, and then the absurd process is repeated again and again, but the great rivers are no cleaner than a millenium since.

That sounds very dismal, John ventured at last, but it seems to me that the important thing is that the individual drop doesn't know its fate, and that its wayfaring, up to a certain point, is quite exciting.

Yes, and here are the drops right now! cried Aliment, as the clouds above began to ease themselves of their burden of moisture.

And yonder is the town and the ferry, said John, pointing to a clump of houses nearly a mile ahead.

The three men, hastily turning up the collars of their coats, broke into a run for shelter.

2

I don't see for the life of me why we couldn't have stayed all night in that town where there was a hotel and where we could have dried our clothes, Aliment complained as they trudged along in the darkness. The roads are muddy and we don't know where we're goin' to sleep, and Lord knows there's going to be no dry hay after a downpour like that.

The man at the ferry said there were houses along this side. We'll find a place after a little, John offered hopefully.

The majority is against you, Aliment, chuckled Tessaract. Neither Howe nor I could have lived through the night in such a filthy hole. The meal was bad enough, and I noticed that the unspeakable hotel had bars at the window. I should have been obliged to break out.

That reminds me, said John, splashing his way through a puddle, of something I have meant to ask you ever since we met. What did you mean by "hypnotize"?

Ha! cried the philosopher, is it possible that you never heard of hypnotism?

Never.

Well, to begin with, I should perhaps explain that we have two minds. . . .

That's two more than some folks I know have, Aliment put in with significant emphasis.

But others seem to have as many minds as there are minutes, said John.

. . . the conscious and the subconscious. And in hypnotism we seek, by some artificial means, such as sensory fatigue, to put the conscious mind of the subject to sleep and thus gain control over the subconscious. When the subject is in this state of seeming slumber the operator can suggest . . .

Mr. Tessaract, heedless of mud and wet, went on joyously to expound his subject with the same gusto that he might have shown before a class in experimental psychology.

Splash, splash—from the feet. Drip, drip,—from the trees. Hypnotic anesthesia . . . catalepsy . . . post-hypnotic suggestion . . . telepathy . . . neurones. . . . It was a curi-

ously punctuated discourse, in a singularly unacademic environment, but John was fascinated.

And what good will it do? he inquired at length.

I was coming to that. You may remember that I suggested it at our first meeting. Briefly it is this: we have come upon a day when the whole world is in danger of being engulfed by democracy,—not democracy such as our fathers dreamed of, but the actual control of stupid majorities. In a few more decades not only the business of kings, but also that of all intelligent rulers will be at an end. When that time comes, it will be the duty of the intellectual minorities, in all countries, to form a secret committee of trained psychologists for the purpose of eliminating undesirable candidates for political office; otherwise demagogues and scoundrels will put an end to civilization. These psychologists will be especially trained in the powers of concentration and in the art of telepathic suggestion. They will destroy the influence of unscrupulous politicians by compelling them to become

as ridiculous before the public as they really are.

How can they ever do that? demanded Aliment, interested in spite of his discomfort.

Very simply, replied the philosopher. When an undesirable candidate attempts to make a speech, some of the committee will concentrate upon him, so that, instead of the phrases that he had intended to use for compliment, he will insult the people, propose obviously foolish policies, or even commit nuisances that will offend the public sense of morality and decency. . . .

I see! shouted Mr. Aliment, you mean that if a man wantin' to be governor of Illinoy gets up to say "Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud of this eventful hour," he will find himself spittin' in the face of the chairman and sayin': You pieface lollipops, you don't know a fine man when you see him; then he might point his finger at the marble statutes of old Abe Lincoln and Steve Douglas, intendin' to tell how grand they were, and yell out—What have you got them cheap tinhorn gamblers stuck up here for? Don't you know that they

didn't have any brains? Wouldn't that man be surprised when they poured on the tar and feathers? Ha! That's a good one!

It was nearing midnight, and the heavy rain of the afternoon and evening had given place to a driving wind which put an end to conversation and made even Mr. Tessaract regret his refusal to remain at the ferry town. The thick darkness had made it impossible to see such dwellings or barns as lay some distance from the roadway, and, what with mud, water, and wind, sleeping on the ground offered no temptations to even the weariest limbs. But just when the situation seemed most hopeless, Aliment, who had stumbled on ahead of the others, suddenly came to a halt, and shouted: Here's a house, fellers!

The ghostly outlines of a large square building loomed out of the blackness. Not a light was visible. Strangely enough, for that part of the world, no dog barked defiance. The road widened immediately in front of the place and seemed to be paved with cobbles. Seeking for a door, the men stumbled into a long hitching rack.

Must be a hotel, said Aliment.

John shouted repeated Hellos without avail.

They can't hear hollerin', said Aliment, I'm goin' to knock.

He almost tripped over the steps. For several minutes the men took turns at pounding on the door, but there was no response.

Nobody lives here, John ventured. We may as well break in.

Here goes, said Aliment, twisting at the knob. But the door opened without resistance.

This is grateful! cried Aliment, feeling his way inside.

Providential, said John, striking a match.

By the flickering light a long, bare hallway was revealed. In front of them was a dreary flight of winding stairs. On one side a door was standing ajar. Opening this, John led the way into a thickly carpeted room where, on a marble-topped table, stood a fat lamp, covered with a shade of crimson. With clumsy fingers he managed at last to light the wick, and by the cheerful glow of the lamp

the men were surprised to find themselves in a large, gaudily furnished room. There were two couches, upholstered with faded red plush, and smothered beneath barbarous pillows. A red scarf lay across a battered piano; pink curtains hung at the windows, and artificial flowers stuck out stiffly from a grotesque vase on the mantel. Above this, framed in gilt, was a canvas, whereon nude women sported in obscene postures. John blushed and turned away hastily.

The place seems to be occupied after all, said Mr. Tessaract.

I reckon you're right about its being a hotel, John decided, judging from the red plush.

Looks like another kind of a public place to me, Aliment said, but we've knocked and called and given fair warnin', so whatever it is, here we're goin' to stay. I'll just take some of these here soft pillows from the sofya, and sleep on the floor; you two can have the sofys to yourselves.

We'd better have a good drink of brandy before we sleep, suggested John Howe, who had replenished his flask at the ferry.

Just the thing! Tessaract agreed, with a weary sigh.

It will keep off the rheumatism and the chills, Aliment added.

When his companions had disposed themselves for sleep John, as was his custom, drew forth the book of prayer, and sitting down beside the table, began his devotions. At least four generations of Howes had read from this well-thumbed little book, and John could have recited most of the services from memory, but the touch of the familiar pages comforted him. His forbears in Virginia had been loyal upholders of the English church, but in Egypt's Valley the ritualistic faiths were despised, and the Howes were, perforce, compelled to hear the Gospel as interpreted by men of sterner creeds, or not at all.

And when John had done his reading, he put out the light and knelt down beside the couch and repeated yet another prayer that he had learned in his childhood:

Ad te, Domine, levavi animam meam: Deus meus, in te confido. . . . John broke off sharply and turned his head towards the door

from which came a sudden blaze of light and strange shuffling sound.

Then came a blast of wind that screamed through the house with a shriek of the damned, and the glare of light in the doorway was red like blood. And as John looked, three faces as of witches, with haloes of evil twisted about their heads, were thrust into the room. It was as though the gates of Hell had been suddenly opened and the tormented were straining to come forth. Not all his faith could afford the power to rise from his knees and confront such terrifying creatures. He opened his mouth to cry out, but the words died within him. For a long moment it seemed that he was faced by some hydra-headed demon with the diabolic power of a Medusa. Then the spell was broken.

What the devil are you doin' here? screamed a stout, kimona-clad woman, pushing forward into the room.

Aw, Rose, they may be friends! came another voice from the hall.

Or drunks, was an added suggestion.

Answer me, you lousy bum! yelled the fat

one, advancing towards John with increasing menace.

By this time fully a dozen women, coarse, bedraggled, frowsy, excited, but obviously curious, were pressing forward to discover the cause of their disturbance.

Recovering himself, John rose to his feet, —We called, he began, indicating the stretched-out figures of his friends. . . .

You called! Listen to that! He called. This is good. Well, we'll call you. Get the hell outta here! Rose administered a powerful kick to the posterior of the recumbent Aliment.

I beg your pardon! exclaimed Tessaract, sitting up suddenly. Then, seeing the company, he got up and made a profound bow.

I am afraid we have intruded, and alarmed you. Our repeated knocking received no answer, so we concluded that the place was empty, and finding it unlocked, took the liberty to enter. I trust you ladies will forgive us, and provide us with some shelter against this stormy night.

His speech was greeted with titters of

amusement, and, indeed, some outright laughter. Rose, however, slightly mollified by the courtesy, demanded at once:

How much money ye got?

Ah, we were right, said John, coming forward. This is a hotel; let me . . .

Rose straightened with offended dignity. This is a respectable road-house! she said, and you'll pay ten dollars apiece' for a room and a gir——

Ladies, I beg of you not to be excited, plead Mr. Tessaract, who failed to understand their exact status. We are prepared to pay a reasonable fee for lodging; and if we're willing to give you the money in advance, what more is there to say?

Ten dollars apiece, or get out, said Rose, squaring her prognathous jaw.

Tessaract began fumbling at his pockets when Mr. Aliment put out a restraining hand, —Hell, Doctor, can't you see these ain't ladies? You don't want to stay here. This ain't a hotel, it's a . . .

What he was going to say can never be known, for at that moment the infuriated

proprietrress struck Mr. Aliment a sharp blow across the mouth, catapulting him clean across the couch.

Come on, girls, beat 'em up; drive the damn tramps to Hell outta here! shouted Rose.

Hypnotize 'em, Doc! cried Aliment, scrambling from beneath the piano.

Right! Bravo! responded the philosopher, delighted by the timely suggestion.

Just look at this, my good woman, he demanded, thrusting forth a small, shining stone which he had taken from his pocket.

Rose halted in mute astonishment. Holding the stone in his left hand, Tessaract began to make sweeping passes with his right.

Killem a Killem a Kolby, I'll get you by and by; Yellow-dog, Yellow-dog, Hijohn, Kayadlem, Polem, Boundem, Yodi, Tessaract recited in a droning voice.

A more unlikely group was never assembled, in such a place. Curious flashes of telepathy darted through the ether; fragments of association jostled one another inconsequentially—

—The long-haired jay's a sweetie, and if

Rose wasn't so mad being waked up, I'd like to have him. Never get a man I really want. . . . All money, money, and she keeps most of it. Nothin' in't fer me but a silk kimono and grub; what's that poor fish tryin' to do? Looks like he's got consumption—a preacher or sumpin'. . . . Don't look like burglars. . . .

—Think we're nothin' but chippies. Good as anybody until Dunlap failed to keep his promise; damn him! Wonder where that brat of mine is now, pore kid! Buck up! One person's as good as another. Tramps, bandits, expect us to give 'em free rent. Just as soon. Maybe lunatics; or convicts. That chain gang on the road out here. . . . Jenny took the boss; Rose made her. Couldn't make me, and I could see he wanted to . . . but there was the singin' feller—made me cry, them songs. Back home in the cabin, Pa pickin' the banjer; no meetin'-house tunes. Gal, if you go wrong, I'll kick you out and kill that feller, shore as hell. . . .

—All these women in one house. . . . Must think we're thieves. Where're their

husbands? Pretty rough. What did Solomon mean? Proverbs. . . . Bad women; shameful picture. Wonder what they do that makes them more attractive than good women? Not one of them can hold a candle to Frances. Old man objects to my prayer book. Does she miss me? Lucky I put it back in my pocket. Could offer a drink; not enough to go round. Will he put her to sleep? . . . Take a lot of time. Watch won't run. . . .

—Hypocrites! Always want to know why you do it; tell 'em anything. Like it myself—never satisfied. Good livin'; better than packin' cans at two bones a day. Why don't she slap the . . .

—Never saw her in such a temper. He was startin' to pay. Fool! Why did I leave town where there was life. Sumthin' doin' all the time. Gettin' too old—twenty-five. Bah! More snap than any of 'em. Fourteen times hand runnin'. Jus' as they was settlin' down as comfortable. Poor dears. . . .

—Crazy. Good God! They'll cut our throats. Gun upstairs; wish I'd brought it. . . . Thought I'd get enough out of this to

buy a place for Ma and me. May snuff out any minute with this Old Dog. Doc isn't doin' me any good with his old medicine. Burns like hell. . . .

—Can't fool with these here women. Seen a house like this in St. Louis. He don't know what they're like. Thinks it's a summer resort. Funny if he got 'em all to sleep and tole 'em they was revenue officers. Seen somethin' like that in a show onct. . . . Mouth hurts—She ought to be skinned alive. . . .

—Difficult to secure subject's undivided attention. Distractions. Unreceptive. Feeble powers of concentration. Very belligerent and aggressive. Mistaken identity. . . .

Keep your eye fixed! said Mr. Tesseract; then, lifting his hand as though for a benediction, he slowly pronounced—

Noga, Jes, Astropolim, Asmo, Cocav, Bermona, Tentator, Soignator, Polamunia.

Then a most astonishing thing occurred. The woman's face, which before had been gross and ugly, was suddenly lighted with amiability and wholesomeness; and the years

seemed to fall away, so that she was young and comely. The whole company was transfixed with wonder.

And when she spoke, her voice was gentle and sweet.

Sir, she said, who are you, and what do you want?

Mr. Tessaract lowered his hand and replaced the stone, which was now of dazzling brightness. We are philosophers, Madame, he answered with a smile.

Ah! Why didn't you tell me so in the first place? she cried.

I have always wanted to meet a philosopher, she explained. I understand that men of your profession can justify my own humble calling.

And what is that? he inquired most politely.

It has to do with strictly human relationships; and I believe, in its essential nature, it originated with a lady whose name was Lilith and who resided in the suburbs of Eden.

I understand, murmured Mr. Tessaract, with a bow. Your way of life is not without

its charm, though I sadly regret its commercial taint.

It is a commercial age, she sighed, regretfully, readjusting the loose folds of her silken kimono. But come, we should not be lamenting. Girls, fetch wine from the cellar, and let us entertain these gentlemen as is fitting for philosophers.

John Howe had been so bewildered by this miracle that he had not removed his eyes from Rose's face; but at her command, he turned and saw that all the women of the house were quite other than they had been during his first moments of terror. A finer company of damsels could scarce have been imagined.

. . . And don't forget, Rose continued, to bring up *The-Bottle-Which-Has-No-Bottom*. That contains the rarest vintage of all.

Let me help, Aliment insisted, as the girls scampered away.

To make amends for my rudeness, you may, the mistress consented. If you gentlemen will assist me, we will fetch a table.

Presently the entire company were cosily settled about the room, now aglow with cheer-

ful light and buzzing with chatter. Aliment was buried in a luxurious chair, on each arm of which snuggled a nymph, listening, wide-eyed, to the tale of his adventures, and busily coöperating in the not unwelcome enterprise of draining wine flasks. On one couch Rose and Mr. Tessaract shared the inexhaustible treasures of The Bottomless Bottle, while he discovered to her the subtleties of metaphysics. But John, sitting cross-legged on a soft pillow, was surrounded by a host of shining-faced young women who heard his poems with strange and wistful delight. At every draught of precious liquor, his verse grew better, until at length they proclaimed him the poet-laureate of their profession.

The minutes sped by with incredible rapidity, and it was not until Mr. Tessaract had completed his outline account of the interminable conflicts between the schools of Being and Becoming, from the days of Empedocles down to those of Eücken, that the mistress of the house got to her feet and proposed a dance.

I'm a li'l unshteady on m'feet, she apologized, so I'll play the piano.

As it turned out, all of them proved to be unable to maintain a proper balance; but seeing that there were so many on the floor, the utter collapse of one couple would be prevented by a toppling pair from an opposite direction. In this way, they might have danced on forever, so compelling was the music, had not a dumbfounded negro cook burst in upon them to announce a new day and breakfast. Then, for the first time, they noticed that Rose had fallen asleep.

But she has been playing up to this very second, declared John.

An' I sho' did heah the mos' won'erful music I 'specs to heah 'til I jines the angels, said the negress.

Mr. Tesseract stepped to the piano, and drew out three empty bottles that lay across the wires. Impossible, said he. This instrument has a convincing alibi.

They were so awed by this occurrence that all through the breakfast hour they sat in silence. And while they ate and drank, it

was as though food and drink were not, and they seemed to have their being in a new dimension.

It was John who broke the silence, at the end of the meal, when he stood up to read the morning prayer. And his voice rang out strong and clear, and at each Amen, it seemed that an invisible choir responded.

When he was done, they raised their heads and looked at one another and wondered.

Not, however, until the cutlery had showed its unease by scampering away to the pantry, and the table cloth had shivered, rolled itself up and fled, did Mr. Tessaract deem it necessary to remind his friends of the advancing day and their pilgrimage.

I thank you, ladies, for your gracious courtesies, he said, making a profound bow, and may you never have reason to regret having shown hospitality to a trinity of philosophers.

In their turn, the women showered benedictions upon the travelers, and expressed their gratitude for all that they had seen and

heard; and when Rose had given them her blessing they departed.

Not until some miles had separated them from the house did John find words to ask:

In the name of Heaven, Tessaract, what was that stone?

Mr. Tessaract thrust his fingers into the capacious depths of his jacket pocket; and then gave a cry of dismay.

The philosopher's stone was gone!

CHAPTER VI

ENLIGHTENMENT BY VIOLENCE

I



AFTER many days along sluggish streamsides and pools of still water, and the swamp lands, where pestilence hovered over the earth like a thick fog, the three men at last drew near the foothills where the air was clean; and beyond these they could see mountains, crowned by white cliffs that caught the light of the sun. And when John Howe saw what was before them, he rejoiced and broke into song.

It is singular, Tessaract commented, that people who leave their homes to find something different are always most delighted by that which reminds them of the place they have just forsaken.

Every pleasant adventure may easily be

spoiled if a man turns his mind to it, John replied.

The difference between pessimism and optimism is largely one of qualitative and quantitative cortical area.

Yesterday I heard you quote with approval: The world is my idea. If that be true, why is it not better to conceive of an existence whose dullness is broken by the expectation of miracles, and whose every sorrow is mitigated by the hope of discovery?

For the simple reason, my dear young man, that the world is so constructed that most of one's hopes are doomed before they are born; and the man who spends his days expecting pleasant miracles, or even simple justice, will be the victim of successive disappointments, so that he must die of bitterness. On the other hand, if we expect evil, we may now and again be pleasantly surprised.

It occurs to me, John suggested, that for all your logic, you have made a serious blunder in presenting the case. The man who makes visions and wonders is playing a game, and does not expect his dreams to become

what the world is pleased to call real. On the contrary, he affirms that his dream is The Reality, and is no whit dismayed by what you call the actual facts. He simply pays no attention to them. Unfortunately, he finished with a sigh, we are seldom able to do this.

We always come back to the old question of What is the purpose of life? Thousands of philosophers have wasted their years trying to solve it.

I don't know nothin' about your philosophy, Mr. Aliment put in, but it looks to me like the police have it about right.

And what do they say? John inquired.

Keep a movin'!

Even the Irish officers hark back to Heraclitus for their thought, Tessaract commented. Perhaps they know as much as he did.

It don't seem to me that this thinkin' grinds any corn, said Aliment.

The philosopher chuckled. It has a very inappreciable effect on human conduct, he conceded. Man does one of two things: he either spends his youth in pleasure and there-

by lays up for himself pain in his old age, or, he galls his early days in grim preparation for an after-enjoyment at a time when, unluckily, his capacity for satisfaction shall have vanished.

Ain't that the gospel truth! Mr. Aliment exclaimed. I laid up a lot of trouble for myself when I was young, and that's the reason I have to be so careful nowadays, guarding against the rheumatiz; to say nothin' about what the Almighty's got comin'. I guess I was a pretty bad sinner when I was in my twenties.

Were you very bad? asked John Howe, with gravity.

Broke most of the commandments, I expect. I coveted my neighbor's wife many a time, to say nothin' of his property, and I've bore false witness several times when I was drove to it. Then I've been drunk lots.

Is that all? John inquired anxiously.

Ain't that enough?

Mr. Aliment, said John, you have sinned in a most petty fashion—scurvily, niggardly. In fact, your sins are unworthy of our Re-

deemer's efforts. Only a blackened evil-doer provides a good testimony to the power of the Lord. What you have recited is child's play, and has nothing whatever to do with evil.

I can't do no more than tell the truth, and I don't aim to endanger my health in order to test Christ's healin' power. It never made me comfortable to sin, no way, although the folks that testify of a Sunday night and at the Salvation Army, seem to get lots of satisfaction from tellin' about their badness.

Mr. Tessaract commended his friend heartily. It is singular, he observed, how persistently the ancient codes hold their own. Christianity provides a great drama, but it is too subtle to wholly satisfy the common man. A public confession of sin has for its Christian element the mystery of atonement and divine forgiveness. The power of that inspires awe; but it is not enough. To gain distinction, the sinner must somehow give out the impression of superior physical power—he beat his wife, killed his mother-in-law, or held up a train. When he confesses in this fashion, see what he accomplishes: he has

now made himself respectable and socially possible by the rejection of an evil life; he has made his fellow-men comfortable by the acknowledgment of common weakness; he has made women adore him by the display of an undoubted virility; and, by recounting his deeds, he has enabled all to enjoy the momentary thrill of vicarious barbarism.

That may provide amusement, John agreed, but it is an insult to Christianity to have it put in such a fashion. All these loud-mouthed little denominations bring reproach on the Faith by their vulgarity. . . .

But weren't you upholding the same thing to Aliment a moment ago?

No, certainly not. To affirm the power of the Lord is one thing; to howl about the blood is another. The one is the faith of a gentleman; the other is the belief of a savage. It is the manner that counts in these things. When I spoke of sin, I referred to unnamable evil. The kind of thing the preachers talk about as sin is merely the act of making a damned fool of yourself. Father used to call them "two-for-nickel" sins.

Well, I don't see what you can do about it, observed Mr. Aliment, who couldn't see any material difference between these theological issues.

Neither do I, John confessed. I reckon though, that if people had more education, religion would be treated with more respect, and we would have beautiful churches and

...

Tessaract broke into a fit of laughter. That is too amusing to pass, he cried. Forgive my laughing, and I will try to explain myself. For it was evident that Howe looked with disfavor upon jest directed at religion.

Come, said the philosopher, here is a wide branching pine, beneath whose ample shade is a ready-made carpet suited either to the dalliance of lovers or to the less serious discussion of the immortal soul. Let us rest here for a while, and I will unfold to you somewhat of the baneful history of brain-tampering.

They were now come well within sight of the highest range of the Boston Mountains, and from the hillside where they were seated,

they could look down upon a straggling little village from which, at lazy intervals, came the rasping music of a sawmill.

There, upon a fragrant mat of pine needles, Mr. Tessaract told his story of the disasters attending popular education. As he talked, spirals of blue-gray smoke struggled heavenwards from the pipes of his disciples, while in the very topmost boughs of the tree a mocking bird was doing his vocal best to imitate a jay.

Laying down ignorance as the broad foundation of all human happiness, he spoke of the pleasures of the Middle Ages, and of how men in those times were blessed with faith, and how, without knowledge, they created beauty. He showed them how the unlettered Egyptians labored to build imperishable monuments among the sand-wastes beside the sacred Nile. True, he explained, they were a bit unwilling at times, but that was due to a slow seepage of knowledge, which, for their comfort, had to be exorcised by force; and the designing of these masterpieces required learning, but it was confined

to those few among men who profit by these adornments.

He explained the fall of man as the result of ethical knowledge. Adam and Eve were happy in the Garden, and all that they did seemed blessed and full of joyance, until they most sinfully bit into the Apple of Moral Distinction and Ethical Culture. Until that moment their differences were a source of satisfaction and peace; but after chewing upon this pernicious fruit, the sum of their variations filled them with shame, and they put on fig leaves, and conscience was born. And the Lord, being Health and Beauty, was disgusted with these sick creatures of His, and cast them forth from His sight.

Then he spoke to them of the art of printing, and of the mischief books had made; and of how Luther, profiting by literacy, had sundered the Church and shattered faith. Reading, and not religion, provoked the horrors of the Inquisition; for reading begets doubt, and the good fathers, in their anxiety to preserve the happiness and insure the salvation of the people, sought to purify them in

flames, which is, perhaps, when all is said and done, the best possible method.

And see what Darwin and the Evolutionists have done to set the world by its ears! They have upset belief and cast doubt upon the divine origin of kings. Men pay no heed to authority when back of every potentate they suspect the tail of an anthropoid ape. To be sure, our evolution from lower forms of life is supported by the facts; but what are facts that we should be mindful of them, or their disagreeable implications that they should be visited upon us?

Mr. Tessaract smiled reminiscently. In my college days, he continued, I lived in a boarding house where there was a most attractive maid who went about her duties with a look of loneliness. I took pity on her and invited her to remain in my rooms one morning that I might introduce her to those heart-healing mysteries whereof Aretino has made frequent mention in his sonnets. The young woman was very innocent, and seemed to derive such entertainment from my youthful attempts to amuse her, that she was impelled

to make frequent visits to my apartment. Indeed, our morning conversations came to be the almost invariable prelude to the day's work. The truth about this little friendship, you can readily see, contains nothing novel, startling, or harmful, and did yield great contentment and joy. But when the facts became known to the other folk in the apartment, they produced discontent, resentment, and even fury. The girl was forced, amid tears and protestations, to forsake an occupation for which she was eminently fitted, and at a place where, latterly, she had begun to get a sense of human sympathy. My indignation over this piece of gross injustice can well be imagined. I moved out next day. Alas, how much misery is occasioned by a knowledge of bare facts! . . .

Nor is it science alone that produces radicalism and sorrow, he went on; the teaching of history is fraught with even greater danger. Prying investigators unearth documents of state, and people are disillusioned concerning the origins of their nation, and the integrity of its founders. Even the best of histories are

a menace. They may contain friendly mention of an empire with which, at any moment, we might wage war; and our soldiers, having been subjected to these pestilent influences, may reach the erroneous conclusion that the enemy is human.

As the evening shadows grew, John Howe and Mr. Aliment came to know that every school house throughout the land is a potential center of treason and unfaith, of unwholesome democracy and discontent; and that information is the enemy of happiness, and that knowledge is the harbinger of despair.

I never saw it in that light, before, said John. I read about how Ponocrates taught Gargantua, and made him a physical giant, skilled and ready; and of how he imparted the lore of all the ages until his pupil was the wisest of men. And I had hoped one day to see just such a school as that of Ponocrates in our own land.

But Gargantua was a super-man, and the scheme of Ponocrates was fitted only for a prince, Tessaract retorted. Princes are born

for responsibility and woe, and it is to the leaders alone that wisdom should be given.

Thank God I am ignorant! exclaimed Aliment with fervor. What information you have given me this day has already made me more uncomfortable than I've been since I had the smallpox.

This valuable knowledge should be spread, John declared; and the intensity of his conviction was such that in the effort to relight his pipe, he burned the end of his nose. To restore ignorance, we must educate the people.

And I say that the best thing we can do for our country is to burn the damned schools to the ground! cried Aliment. They ruined Tom, and they are nothin' but a burden to honest taxpayers and a torment to kids. We oughta set in and make an end to 'em.

John leaped to his feet in excitement. Good Lord, but I do believe you are right, Aliment. Burning schools is our mission. What do you say?

I'm with you, heart and soul! said Aliment. And the two zealous reformers clasped hands

in solemn confirmation of their common purpose.

Gentlemen, I implore you not to do anything rash. I didn't dream you would take this matter so seriously. In university circles, things that are many times more deplorable than what I have just related to you are discussed daily, but no one thinks of taking action. That is what culture does for one; it renders one inactive. At the worst, the schools impart much less knowledge than you have any idea. And few of the pupils who come within the range of their influence are able to understand even that. Besides, the masters, luckily, contradict one another, and thus neutralize the malefic effects of their misguided efforts.

So please . . .

But Howe and Aliment could not understand this sophistry. They had been horrified by the philosopher's recital, and, in their straightforward simplicity, had determined upon a drastic course of action. Ignorance was at stake.

Do as you like, said John, but we are re-

solved to apply a torch to every pestiferous school we see.

Dear me, sighed Tesseract, I fear now that even stupidity is doomed, for where you endeavor to spread ignorance by force, knowledge will spring up like a weed.

2

At the outset, this program of benevolent incendiarism was executed with but little difficulty; for, guided by the more mature wisdom of Mr. Aliment, they contrived to come upon what they were pleased to call the "enemy" by night-time, and to seek cover before the flames betrayed their presence. By the end of their first week, nearly a score of cross-roads and village schools had been reduced to ashes. But John was dissatisfied with their method of approach. Being a ritualist in faith, if not in practice, he felt that a spiritual mission demanded a more praiseworthy technique. To guarantee wide-reaching results, he maintained, they should announce their high purpose to the people,

explain their motives, and thus secure a hearty social coöperation. After this, the building could be burned with appropriate ceremonies; or, if the community so desired, could be transformed into a bar-room, or even a house of worship.

To all of this, Aliment was stoutly opposed. He was sure folk would misunderstand their principles and interpose objection to their practice. If it were necessary that the populace be instructed concerning the reasons for their sudden iconoclasm, Mr. Tessaract could prepare a paper to be left on a conspicuous sign-board.

Not for the world! declared that gentleman. A thing is untrue just as soon as it is put into writing; and the more it is read, the more fallacious it becomes. If it is not believed, it accomplishes naught; if it is accepted, it becomes a dogma,—and dogmatic ignorance is even more deadly than scholasticism.

Indeed, the good man was so troubled by these nocturnal excursions of his impetuous friends, and so anxious for their safety, that

he had taken to a somewhat excessive use of brandy. I must be fortified against the worst, he said. And when his companions objected to his inebriety, and demurred against their frequent errands to the simple little bar rooms along the way, he replied that his contentment was in exact proportion to his state of intoxication. For all my knowledge, I am happy and conservative when I am drunk; you, who but taste your liquors, foment revolution. Temperance endangers the state; teetotalism would wreck it. . . . John, my friend, I implore you to go to yonder village and fetch me another quart.

Oddly enough, it was on an occasion when John was about this daily service for Mr. Tessaract, that he made the first misstep of his campaign. Free for the moment from the restraining influence of Mr. Aliment, he decided to lay his case before the public. Claspings the bottle to his bosom, he approached the villagers, one by one, attempting to enlist their sympathy in the cause of nescience. But, to his pained surprise, they were not interested.

Ignorance is so vital, he pled, so simple, so easy to acquire, that every one ought to embrace it at the earliest opportunity. Seeing that this had no effect upon his hearers, he began to make prophecy—One day you will be sorry for your persistence in crushing out the faith of the little children by the doctrines of the schools. You take away their Santa Claus and the fairies now, and later they will doubt God, government, and the devil. They will respect nothing. Our bravest family ghosts will not dare to show their whitened heads.

But the men in front of the stores winked at one another and laughed, until, desperate at his unsuccess, he urged them to join with him in destroying the single building which the district devoted to public education. At this, they grew serious, and one old man stopped his whittling long enough to raise an objection.

Looka here, son, you're gettin' on soggy ground, as the sayin' is. We'uns hold a dance onct a year in that there schoolhouse, and I do the fiddlin'. If a man was to tech that

schoolhouse, I reckon sumpin' 'ud happen to him right smart.

Now you're talkin', said another, my Sadie's been a teachin' there for goin' on three year, and she gits thirty dollars a month in good money. You can't come a pesterin' aroun' here.

You fail to see my point, friends, said John. Every day your children are being given information which destroys their native born simplicity and their inalienable right to contentment and peace of mind. The Bible says, He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow; and the poet Gray declared that: Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. If you prefer modern instances, look to our great representatives in Washington who, year by year, increase in happiness until they have almost reached the heights of ecstasy. Emulate their example, and begin by giving the young a chance. Burn your school or turn it into a dance hall; let your teacher marry an honest man and . . .

I b'lieve that's the feller that's been a-settin' fire to schoolhouses down the valley, volun-

teered a freckled youth who had just come upon the scene.

By gum, I never thought of that! exclaimed Sadie's father, expectorating with such violence as to expel a comparatively new and generous quid of tobacco. Look here, stranger, where did you all come from?

Thereupon began argument, expostulation and inquisition which bade fair to end in riots and calls for a rope had not the old fiddler, whose heart had been softened by the suggestion of a dance hall, crept near to John Howe's side and whispered—

I think you are plum crazy, but if ye've got any sense at all, ye'd better take to yer heels and head for the woods while you've got a chanct.

Sensing the atmosphere of momentarily increasing hostility, John saw the wisdom of this advice, and, with a muttered word of thanks, slipt quietly around the corner and dashed for the protecting shelter of the forest.

Such, however, is the nature of fame that—we are told—the world beats a path even into its forest home. And during the days im-

mediately following Howe's rash venture, he and his friends required anxious pains to avoid the indignant exponents of education, and to keep well out of the range of their excellent weapons. Thanks to John's familiarity with forest trails and to a wholesome desire, shared by all three, to shun personal contact with belligerents, they continued their journey in comparative safety, though not without severe hardships. Forced to abandon both the valley roads and the winding paths along the hillsides, they were compelled to break their way through tangled thickets of sassafras and holly, blackberry and persimmon, leaving behind fragments of cloth and drops of blood to bear mute testimony of their passage.

Due to these trying circumstances both Howe and Aliment had agreed to a temporary cessation of their missionary activities; a conclusion reached only after many solemn conferences, and made tolerable by Mr. Tessaract's promise to maintain a moderate sobriety. They would, therefore, have been able to escape untouched, had it not been

necessary to replenish their stock of food and tobacco. On the fourth day, reckoning that they had passed beyond the area of actual hostility, they came down from the wooded hills to the edge of a narrow valley bordered, on the opposite side, by precipitous mountain peaks, the crests of which seemed lost in the clouds. Late in the afternoon they drew near to a little settlement from whose humble dwellings came the fragrant odors of beans and bacon and frying chicken with such power as to overcome well nigh all sense of caution. Aliment, however, was firmly of the opinion that it would never do for them to enter the place in a body. Acting upon his suggestion, Tessaract and Howe reluctantly consented to remain concealed behind a clump of cypress trees while their business agent made the necessary purchases at the village store. He recited the list of their wants:

Two plugs of chewin', and three sacks of smokin' tobaccor; three cans of pork and beans; six of sardines; two loaves of bread; one spool of thread; one package of needles; a paper of court plaster, and a cake of soap.

. . . He paused for a moment and turned to Mr. Tessaract,—perfumed? he questioned, somewhat wistfully.

No, no indeed, my friend, said the philosopher, who had been frequently embarrassed by Mr. Aliment's tastes in that direction, just plain toilet soap; and do hasten, for I am ravenous.

I'm going to be careful, said Aliment, as he started forth, but you might read that prayer about absent loved-ones, John.

Howe, said Tessaract, when they were alone, I regret having informed you concerning the blunders of mankind even to the slight extent to which I was guilty, for just see what havoc it has played with our fortunes. A few days since, we were able to go where we would, openly; now we are fearful and secretive. And why? Because we have meddled with human prejudice; because we have not been content to seek our own happiness, but have attempted to teach others. It is a fatal mistake to exhibit a radical difference of opinion.

I can't agree with you, John replied, but I

reckon Aliment was right about doing our work at night, and not speaking to the folks. . . .

Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth, is the advice of Scripture. . . .

There was a sound as of someone running, and, from the direction of the village, shouts arose. Mr. Aliment, puffing excitedly, dashed through the cypress screen.

No time to explain. . . . Mob startin'. . . . Accused me right off. . . . Hit for the top of this mountain, he gasped.

The growing volume of imprecation and command that issued from the settlement checked any desire for investigation, and drove the thought of hunger, which, a second previous, had been so assertive, down somewhere into that cortical or medullary area known as the subconscious. Once more the peripatetic philosophers were transformed into terrified fugitives.

Roaming through unknown forests, and skirting heavily thicketed hillsides, they had made much less progress than they had imagined, and were not more than fifteen

miles away from the scene of their last depredation. Rumor had gone before them, and since strangers were a rarity in those parts, the three were, as the novels have it, marked men. Moreover, Mr. Aliment's appearance was not, in his present scratched and torn condition, reassuring. He had no sooner set foot in the general store and post-office than one of the villagers called out:

There's the fat 'un that they want over at Pearlyville; grab him, boys!

And Mr. Aliment, recognizing the futility of a more dignified course of action, fled.

CHAPTER VII

THE INHOSPITALITY OF A DEN OF THIEVES



NEVER found out what they had been doin', Cap'n; whether it was rape, murder, or just crackin' a crib; but they were surely runnin', and the sheriff was hot on their trail. Ain't that a good enough testimonial?

They looked like tramps to me, Jones, and we've got to be careful of our company, you know. Industry and organization are the watchwords of successful crime. To harbor loafers is not only to encourage waste but to weaken our morale. These southern tramps are the hardest cases in the whole world.

I'm pretty careful, Cap'n Henderson, protested Jones, and I'm sure that no mere tramps would have raised enough devilment to cause all the shootin' and hollerin' there was at the foot of this here mountain last

night. These men have done somethin' mean, and no mistake. Somethin' real mean.

I pray that you are right, my friend, said Henderson, stroking his thick black beard and looking earnestly at his companion. If you are not right, you may need to pray. He paused as if to let the full significance of these words strike home. Meantime you may rouse the gang for breakfast, and let us have a look at your protégés by the light of day.

Eagle's Nest, as Henderson was wont to call this somewhat barren mountain top, was one of the highest points of the Boston range, and, though not so inaccessible as two other peaks near at hand, was sufficiently so to make it a safe refuge against any ordinary attacks by the local constabulary. It had been a hiding place for outlaws before Henderson's day, and he was now utilizing, for his own private residence, the rude cabin which, for years, had been the only evidence of human habitation on the mountain top. The ten men who together formed his force of anti-social co-laborers, made out as best they could in a long, rambling and but recently con-

structed abode of pine poles and mud, situated at a respectful distance from the more ancient, honorable, and comfortable domicile of him whom they had, for various reasons of diplomacy, elected to call captain. A night sentry did duty for each of these dwellings, and it was Ken Jones, an angular, heavily mustached Kansan of Welsh origin, who, having heard the turmoil of the night before, had slipped down the mountain side and, after discovering that the pursuers were wrathful defenders of law and order, and, therefore, very much *persona non grata*, had decided to extend hospitality and temporary fellowship to the pursued. Tessaract, Aliment and Howe, after a terrible moment of despair at what seemed to be capture by a bloodthirsty enemy, suddenly conceived of Jones as a timely messenger from Heaven, come to snatch them from the jaws of an almost sure destruction. Had it not been for his frosty air of reserve, they would have fallen upon his neck and wept for joy. The two six-shooters that hung low at each of their saviour's hips also contributed to the inhibi-

tory effect of his marked reticence; and thus an effervescing gratitude was transformed into a more decorous, if less demonstrative, propriety. After some questioning, the three exhausted idealists were led to the general sleeping quarters at Eagle's Nest, whose hard floor proved to be a pleasant pallet, and whose flimsy walls yielded a comforting sense of peace and protection. Thus philosophers came to dwell among thieves.

For the first few days nothing could have been happier or more congenial than this intimate association with a company of men whose calling had made them at once alert, and, as the common saying has it, broad minded. Never, Mr. Tessaract observed to Howe, had he found men capable of looking at our human institutions with such complete detachment, nor more eager to grasp golden opportunities for advancement. It was very refreshing. True, there had been a moment's coldness between Henderson and Tessaract when it was disclosed that the latter was a graduate of Harvard, while the former owed his academic training to Yale; but that soon

passed away, with the discovery that both men had been confirmed at the same village church, and had received their spiritual teaching from the same worthy rector.

Nevertheless, as the days sped by, the visitors grew conscious, little by little, of certain subtle differences, manifesting themselves not so much in outward form or in specific instance, as in a general lack of rapprochement. Recipients of a generous hospitality, they were aware of an undercurrent of unspoken disapproval. It was only after considerable study that Tessaract was able to define the cause of this so regrettable disharmony. It arose, he contended, from a sense of superior specialization. These highly trained bandits were unable to appreciate the value of a broader culture, as such. Where does it lead? And what does it get you? were questions that were ever in their hearts if not on their lips. Service and self-reliance were paramount, and it was only by an extremely restricted but thorough course of instruction that they were enabled to fulfill their several functions. Henderson was a skilled lock-

smith, but felt that even this degree of specialization was too general in its scope, and hence had confined himself to a perfect understanding of safe combinations; Jones focused his attentions on evening holdups, practiced on solitary gentlemen of advanced age; Barlowe did second stories of red brick houses; White picked ladies' handbags; Van Hess robbed express cars. The only general functions of the company were mutual protection, and a careful conservation of the material results of their combined thrift and foresight. It came about, therefore, that technique was rated higher than the original genius which was the occasion of their togetherness. That boyish spirit of adventure which had, no doubt, been the life of the group, was lost in an over-refined particularization.

This tendency not only created an atmosphere of patronage and quiet disdain, but also,—and this was one of its most painful features,—it made for an exaggerated seriousness which led, almost, to ascetism. Efficiency being rated as of next importance to godliness itself (and Howe, for one, suspected that if all

were told they would have placed efficiency first), no pleasure that seemed, for an instant, to dim the faculties, was permitted. Banditry throve best under a régime of dull living and sharp thinking, Henderson maintained, and for this reason he was strongly opposed to alcoholic beverages of any sort. John's flask was politely refused on the morning of their first formal introduction into the society of Eagle's Nest; and when, immediately after their initial breakfast, Aliment passed round his tobacco pouch, the captain gravely reproved him with:

Tobacco is all wrong, my friend. It makes a pillar of pungent cloud by day and a glow of fire by night, betraying men of our stern profession to any unwelcome prowler who may be possessed of either sight or smell. Its use is therefore discouraged in this fellowship.

Amazed as well as pained by such unwonted conduct, such coldly virtuous speech, John was almost led to doubt the genuineness of his host's piety, or, at all events, to classify him as an unregenerate disciple of ethical culture.

This unjust prejudice was not suffered long to vex his soul, however; for on the afternoon of that same day, Captain Henderson, having divined the young man's anxiety, led him to his own cabin, where, set up in one corner, was a shrine to his patron, Saint Dimas.

I could not bear, said Henderson, after both men had paid their devotions, the thought that you should go to your couch troubled with misgivings as to the sincerity and depth of my religious convictions. True it is that the highest and purest forms of worship suffer no alloy of ethical principle, or, as a great man has chosen to phrase it, no corroding touch of moralic acid. I deplore the necessity that has forced me to yield somewhat of my childhood faith to the exigencies of an unideal world. But in the realm of crime there are strict standards of efficiency to be maintained, a code to be observed with nicety, responsibilities to be borne, an example to set, and such a fierce competitive battle to wage, that the compromise must be made. It is the tribute modernity forces us to render a vulgar

comfort. So, under the circumstances, you will forgive my scruples?

John inclined his head.

A gentleman could do no less, sir, he said, and I thank you for explaining a course of conduct, which, I must own, seems incompatible with the true faith. It only goes to show that appearances are very deceiving, and that one man never knows the temptations undergone by another. Now I had begun to reason that your—er—profession had, perhaps, no room for . . .

On the contrary, the captain interrupted, in a life fraught with such daily risks as we must needs be subject to, the miracle of religion and the comfort of faith is much more necessary than for those who live in the cathedral close. We are momentarily conscious of being on the threshold of eternity, while the more plodding business man feels that he may live forever. Moreover, he, amassing a fortune by cut and dried system of routine, following A, B, and C, becomes fundamentally incredulous of the supernatural; while we, depending upon flashes of inspiration,

must, perforce, believe in miracles and wonders. We are naturally religious.

Come seven; come 'leven; tell 'em babies. The sound of eager voices floated in from the door yard where the brotherhood of happy outlaws were grouped around in a circle enjoying the ancient pastime of kings and philosophers. The clicking of ivory cubes made an intermittent punctuation to passionate invocations addressed to the goddess of fortune.

That is not, according to the most liberal definition, a Christian religion, observed John Howe, pointing toward the door.

But one of our most charming essayists has pointed out that, in the very bosom of Christianity, an ineradicable element of paganism has lingered on, lending both fascination and power to the later faith. Without some slight inconsistency life would not be tolerable. Moreover, the sport to which you allude should, strictly speaking, be considered from an economic, rather than from a theological point of view. It is a sub-topic under the head of the distribution of wealth.

Then I don't quite see . . .

Of course you don't; idealists never do. It is regrettable of course, but one of the most inescapable compromises of this present age is that between business and religion. Business built the modern world, and gave to most of us the opportunity for wealth; *ergo* it must possess the sanction of Divine Providence. Commerce and Christianity must, therefore, be made to agree; and, if there is to be a concession, it is evident that commerce must not suffer. Every great world crisis brings the problem to a focus; every successful extension of trade proves, beyond reasonable doubt, that commerce is really the better part of Christianity. Faith, Hope, and Commerce, these three, and the greatest of these is . . .

But sir!

Pardon me a moment. Patriotism, put into modern language, means—boost your own home town; stand by your trade. And discerning modern eyes have come to see that this sentiment is the cream of a religion of love and loyalty. The drummer is our best

missionary, the trade catalogue is a confession of faith; and when a final edition of the Handbook of Business Maxims is complete, it will be placed before Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in our revised New Testament. Revelation never ceases.

Before John could collect his wits for a reply to what he conceived to be an unwarrantable heresy, there came a sudden increase of volume in the sounds without, and, above them all, an outburst of rude profanity from Mr. Aliment, who was protesting loudly about something, something loaded dice. Henderson's face grew purple, and, making a strange gesture towards his right hip, he strode wrathfully out into the open. Terrified by this unexpected display of temper, Howe followed, trembling for the safety of his friend.

My man, cried the outlaw, as he confronted the aggrieved but now astonished Aliment, I do not permit blasphemy in this camp. Death is the usual penalty for such words as you have uttered. . . .

It wasn't blasphemy, interposed Mr. Tes-

saract, hastening to the defense of his disciple, it was mere swearing.

What do you know about it? snarled Henderson, angered by the interference. You weren't at Yale.

Harvard men are gentlemen, answered Mr. Tessaract, returning look for look.

The two men glared fiercely, and for a moment it seemed as though they would fly at one another's throats; then the philosopher mastered the academician, and, throwing back his head, Mr. Tessaract burst into song:

Hey diddle diddle
The cat and the fiddle
And the cow jumped over the moon,
Crying Boola Boo!
And a Boola Boo!
And a Boola, Boola, Boola, Boola, Boo!

The great bandit's features slowly relaxed, and as the Harvard man came to the chorus he impetuously stretched forth his hand in repentance, and the two, arm in arm, shouted lustily and in perfect unison:

Boola Boo, and a Boola, Boola, Boola, Boola, Boo!

There is no reason why we should ever quarrel, my friend, said Henderson, when they had done, but now that we have had this season of restorative song, perhaps you will enlighten me as to the occasion of this man's near-fatal explosion of profanity?

As nearly as I could make out, replied Tessaract, Aliment's indignation was excited by what he evidently deemed a case of double personality in those ivory cubes. Whenever he took up the little creatures they were light, fickle, trivial, and behaved in a most unsatisfactory manner; but when some other of these good men handled them they became docile, obedient, tractable, and habitually indicative of good fortune. Moreover, they seemed, in other hands, to wear a yellowish cast not apparent a second previous. They . . .

Was loaded, put in Aliment, who had barely suppressed his indignation. They was cheatin'.

Now, now! rebuked Henderson, cheat is a dangerous word. It is clear to me, Aliment, that you are unfamiliar with business methods. Skill, science, and forehanded ingenuity, on

the part of the self-reliant, are often mistaken for unfairness. To protest proves inferiority—a lack of thrift. Fortune favors the better man in every case. Are you unfamiliar with the Scripture, To him that hath shall be given? Come, don't whine. Be a man, and play the game. And, above all, remember this—Henderson's tone was graver now—we cannot permit blasphemy within the hearing of these devoted men. The example is bad.

Yes, sir, murmured the abashed sinner. I'll load my own dice after this.

Bravo, cried the captain, clapping him on the back heartily. You'll be an honor to this camp yet.

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Now no successful organization, such as that which made its temporary headquarters at Eagle's Nest, can be maintained without coöperative effort under democratic but efficient management. The coöperative effort is not difficult to secure if there be a stimulating motive. At Eagle's Nest this motive was fostered among the comrades by a laudable ambition for gain and a wholesome re-

spect for their leader's marksmanship. Efficient democracy may seem to many an unattainable ideal, or even a contradiction in terms, but Henderson secured it by the simple and direct method of stern dictatorship. It was touchingly beautiful in its almost child-like naïveté. The captain did all the thinking, formulated all the governmental policies, and then magnanimously permitted the free citizens of his colony to exercise their sovereign right of casting a ballot which confirmed his superior judgment. Only one man had ever been known to err in the discharge of this pleasing duty. He was buried beneath a stone bearing the wise legend: *Infra tuam pelliculam te contine*,—Be content to save your own skin. After that, sound thinking was the chief concern of every member of the little democracy; all felt free to think and act within reasonable limits. Indeed, Henderson spared no pains in the matter of making every one of his subjects seem to be wholly untrammelled. The idea of liberty pleases them so much, he said, that it were a pity not to gratify them . . . hence it is that I speak

of this noble passion every day. It is a magic word; with it on one's lips one can perpetrate anything.

Under this benevolent government the daily duties were apportioned after a communal fashion, Henderson alone being exempt. It was no more than fitting, therefore, that the visitors do their share of service as a slight return for the succor extended them in a time of dire need. Thus it came about that John Howe shook and aired the blankets, carried the water from a crystal cold spring which gushed from beneath the rocks a scant half mile below, made the fire, and tended the spit before every meal; Aliment washed dishes, cut and carried wood, peeled potatoes, and waited on the table; Tessaract, being a college man, cleaned house for the captain, mended clothes, and did the washing. In this way the time passed very rapidly, and the three friends came into intimate personal contact with all of the members of the community.

As if to compensate for the monotony of this daily routine, there was held, on each Wednesday evening, after the supper dishes

were cleared, an informal open forum which had come to be known as The Experience Meeting. Gathered about a friendly fire in the open space between the dormitories, with no other witnesses than the blinking stars, the genial bandits confessed themselves, related to one another the exciting incidents of their several careers, acknowledged their failures, gave and received comfort, and, be it said, sometimes boasted an unusual prowess. All were given an opportunity to be heard, and if any, through timidity, seemed reluctant to press forward, Henderson was ready with his word of encouragement:

Don't be afraid to stand up and testify for the Cause.

To be sure these speeches were apt to have a set form that detracted somewhat from the brilliance of the narrative. Almost invariably they began with: Brethren, for many years I lived in error and incompetence, having no true profession and wasting precious opportunities. Then I found . . . I can well remember the first time. . . . It was near a little log chicken house. . . . Since

then . . . and ended with: I hope that you will all remember me in my weakness, and help me to lead a more skillful life. At the conclusion of the duller of these talks, Henderson, if the sentries had previously reported the coast clear, would propose a snatch of some stimulating song to clear the way for a more enlivening discourse.

On their first Wednesday the visitors were permitted to remain mere listeners to what seemed, to their untrained ears, tales of thrilling adventure; descriptions of how bits of unearned increment had been removed from the leisure classes; of how treasure trains had been arrested in their flight across the continent; of how indiscreet and impetuous citizens had, during some delicate ordeal of nocturnal exchange, thoughtlessly brought swift doom upon themselves by noisy and excited behavior; studies in the nice art of using high explosives. It was marvelously entertaining and informative. At the second meeting, however, Henderson felt that, since the newcomers were sufficiently acquainted to feel at home, courtesy demanded that they have

a hearing. Accordingly, after the opening song and roll call, the captain got to his feet and said:

Brethren of the order, there are three among us, who, though they have not yet qualified for admission to our circle, should, none the less, have the privileges of this forum extended them. It is our right to know whether they are men of high purpose, and whether their deeds have been worthful; it is their right that they should justify themselves and share the joys of free speech as well as that purgation which comes of this confessional. I will therefore call first upon Mr. David Tessaract, scholar, peripatetic philosopher, and, latterly, head laundryman to this body.

Friends of the night, began Mr. Tessaract, I am indeed of all men most unworthy to address such a body of experts. You, who follow in the illustrious footsteps of Jonathan Wild, Sixteen-String Jack, Deacon Brodie, and the late Mr. Jesse James, will find little in my career to emulate. The only outward sin of commission to which I can point is

that of having spent seven years in the pursuit of useful knowledge. (Hear! Hear! cried Henderson). In that time, however, I failed to gain any of that technical skill of which all of you are, in some degree, masters (groans and prayers.) Metaphysically speaking, my accomplishments are of a higher order. Once upon a time, in a moment of rage, I wished to kill my father. I failed of courage. The more discriminating and subtle reasoners concerning ethical questions declare that a wicked thought is equivalent to an overt act; therefore my father was, according to philosophy, murdered, and his son is a parricide (applause). Apart from a brief incarceration at an institution for the detention of those who reason from false premises, I have lived a life of aimless wandering and speculation. I am heartily ashamed, good people, to bear witness to such an unprofitable existence.

Let us join in singing, proposed the captain, who shared the general depression caused by Tessaract's words,—There's a Better Day Coming.

Aliment, when his turn came round, was

plainly puzzled concerning what he should say. I can't talk like the doctor there, he explained. I guess I ought to be sorry that I can't confess nothin' except that I have stole some rides, and that onct I swiped a chicken when I was hungry—but I went back and paid for that with a day's work. I'd like to entertain you, but I can't.

By the time Howe rose to speak the air was noticeably laden with frost, and Henderson was nervously tugging at his mustache like one beside himself.

Why a man should apologize for being decent is more than I am able to fathom, said John. Moreover, in my church we don't have experience meetings, for the reason that we don't have experience; we have always been respectable and expect to continue so. Of course I did drown a man once, but he was one of these loud-mouthed town-boomers, and I killed him for pleasure and not for profit. (At this point there was no inconsiderable outcry among the bandits, for it is well known that men of their profession hold the exploiters of city subdivisions in high

esteem.) I reckon that I haven't done anything but follow my dreams, and I am not ashamed of that. I loved a woman once; I love her still; but her pa hated my ways, and she clung to him. She stayed where the sap of the trees runs sweet, and where the bees gather honey; but it's not right to talk about that woman,—except to the flowers in the daytime, and the stars at night. John hesitated for a moment. I'm a religious man, and haven't much respect for this practical morality, and even less for your business principles; but, seeing that politeness is the order of the evening, and some uplifting sentiment the end, I beg of you to permit me to read, for your edification, some choice passages from a book I always carry—*The Lives, Heroic Deeds, and Sayings of Gargantua*, by Master Rabelais. . . .

It is high time for this foolishness to come to an end! Henderson put in suddenly, rapping a sharp command with the butt of his revolver. Evidently these men are either sheep in wolves' clothing, or they are, because of some foul suspicion, afraid openly to share

their secrets with us. Our hospitality is being abused. Why were you chased out of the valley by the sheriff and his lackeys, if you are not real men of courage and daring? he demanded.

Oh! I see, cried John, his face now alight with understanding. Why, sir, we had just been engaged in a campaign of burning schoolhouses for the purpose of . . .

Henderson's weapon clattered to the ground. The man reeled as from a sharp blow. Burning schoolhouses! My God! he gasped in a hoarse whisper. You, you are an enemy of progress, of science that has given us every acid we may apply to locks; every gas with which we asphyxiate; every explosive with which we open stubborn banks; every tool of our great profession. You are the anti-Christ!

Lynch 'em, Cap'n, suggested one who, more quickly than the rest, had recovered from this unprecedented shock.

Lynch 'em, urged another.

No, said Henderson, regaining his composure somewhat, and remembering his re-

sponsibilities as a leader. Let me think a minute. . . .

His followers drew nearer together, muttering angry threats.

These men are indeed dangerous, and should be placed under a guard, he went on presently, but by the dawn of another day I shall, perhaps, have discovered a plan by which such diabolic scoundrels may be put to some useful service. Watch them closely tonight, men. Remember that they are the foes of true democracy, and are indeed desperate characters. Tomorrow I will deal with them. The meeting is dismissed. . . . God save our public schools!

The broken man, his face incredibly aged and drawn by the unlooked for turn of events, moved away with a gesture of despair and staggered toward his cottage door.

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The rising sun discovered Henderson in an agony of perplexed meditation, pacing back and forth on the flat surface of an overhanging cliff, fully a half mile distant from the camp. What should he do with men who

were not only deficient in those fine graces without which any success in the more lucrative ways of crime is impossible, but also, and here was the point of the terrible business, were possessed by a vicious spirit of radical individualism which was liable to undermine the moral standards of his faithful band, corrupt their ideals, pervert their patriotism, and, ultimately, transform them into snobs. On the other hand it was unwise, once having received such men into this fast stronghold, to let them go forth as potential tale bearers to possible enemies. In well regulated fellowships it was customary to confer the degree of everlasting silence upon those who for any reason wished to withdraw. This last did not seem so necessary, Henderson now reasoned, since, as a matter of fact, they were already planning to shift the scene of their operations some leagues toward the West.

In the midst of these brain racking problems, the great bandit's eye was suddenly arrested by the magnificent panorama which the mounting sun now revealed. The valleys below were bathed with light which, as the

fast dissipating fog lifted upward, was caught and reflected by the clear streams that now wound about like glittering serpents in a green jungle. Dew-sprinkled pastures were emeralds, and the fresh tilled fields were sardonyx. Unpainted farm houses and the clustered roofs of the hamlets, in that moist morning light, shone like agate.

Henderson drew out of its worn leather case the field glass which inevitably accompanied him on his excursions. He was an ardent child of nature, and his love of her phenomena was not lessened by an insatiable fondness for a more minute scrutiny of detail than is vouchsafed unaided vision. This, aside from the fascination of the great open spaces, was no doubt the determining factor in his choice of occupation. Entranced by the scenes spread out at his very feet, he moved the instrument slowly from point to point as if endeavoring to fix each detail of the landscape with an indelible precision. All at once he gave a start which compelled him to re-focus his glass. Excitement seemed to possess the man. Swiftly he surveyed each of the

straggling villages whose chimneys were just now beginning to give off the first filmy evidence of slow-awakening human life. Exclamations of satisfaction broke from lips now enwreathed in a smile. A moment more and he gave way to fits of immoderate laughter.

Praise the Lord! he cried. This will cure them—the poor fools! Hastily replacing the field glass in its cover, he turned about, and with a swinging stride that attested a new found buoyancy, hastened on towards the camp.

.

To three other men, also, the night had been long and without comfort. Prevented from speaking together, each speculated in solitude on the fate of the morrow. The breakfast hour found the prisoners pale and hollow eyed, and that meal was eaten in a reproachful silence which by no means encouraged hope. No respectable thief would lower himself by friendly exchanges with a social heretic.

Men, I have come to a decision which I am sure you will all be glad to hear, announced

the captain as the last tin plate was cleared. As most of you know, we have been contemplating a change of headquarters for some months. The country hereabouts has little left to offer us, and, having learned, from a careful study of agricultural statistics, that a more worthy neighborhood, many miles away, harbors a score of financial depositaries that are, at the present time, suffering from congestion, I have thought it fit to take this occasion to order immediate preparation for our departure. But you are doubtless more eager to know my decision in the case of Howe, Aliment, and Tessaract. Henderson could not suppress a look of gloating satisfaction over what was to come. That they are perfidious villains may be at once deduced from the fact that their ideas are diametrically opposed to sound democratic principles—to our principles. But it is also a fact that these men are full of energy—an energy that should be utilized for some worthy purpose of social betterment. I have therefore decided to give them a chance. They may either renounce their evil doctrines and join our band,

or be cast out and turned over to the machinery of the law. You may ask why, in the event that they refuse our generous offer, I should not sentence them to death. I answer that justice is not always expedient; the disposal of their bodies might prove embarrassing and inconvenient. Nor do I think that this stern course will be necessary. At the break of day I made a discovery which will, I firmly believe, persuade the wildest of these fanatics of the futility of his dreams. Presently I shall lead the prisoners to the cliff and let them see with their own eyes the refutation of their unspeakable folly. However, lest they should prove to be hardened beyond hope, I have made this arrangement. You will recall that in return for specific privileges, I have made certain agreements with our friend, the deputy sheriff; also, I once promised him, in your presence, that, if any one of you should fail to live up to the high standards of this fellowship, a signal should be given whereby the officer should know that, somewhere on the trail between this point and the first village, a disgraced outcast was being driven

toward his natural enemy. You know what that means.

Howe, Tessaract, Aliment, stand up! cried Captain Henderson, turning more directly upon the prisoners. There are only three ways to get away from this mountain top; one is the eastern trail up which you came, and where you may expect to meet a justly angered officer of the law; the western trail, which we will take within an hour; or the central route, which is practically inaccessible and leads to Ghost Mountain and Death's Head, two lofty peaks on which it is impossible to live, and from which it would be exceedingly difficult to escape. Bear these things in mind; but remember that you are free to choose. Come!

By now the sun was pouring down a flood of light, and one could almost see the people in the streets of the diminutive towns below. Without a word of comment, the outlaw chieftain handed his glass to Mr. Tessaract, who, after a careful focusing, studied object after object with no particular result.

What do you wish me to look for? he inquired, at length.

Don't pretend an innocence that isn't yours; look for the scenes of your depredations, of course.

Oh!

Perhaps two minutes elapsed before Mr. Tessaract lowered the glass and calmly returned it to its owner. It is no more than I expected, said he. I never approved of an active opposition to social prejudice. But it will be a great blow to you, my good friends, to learn what I have just seen, and what I pray you will not have the foolhardihood to gaze upon. In the little communities where your misguided zeal led you to apply the torch, there are now two schoolbuildings for every one you destroyed!

Lord! Lord! groaned Howe and Aliment in chorus. A second later, and the two sorely stricken reformers, with tear-stained faces, threw themselves into one another's arms and sobbed.

Tessaract, my friend, it is plain to me that you are the brains of this party, whispered Mr. Henderson. What is it to be: the East or the West; safety or surrender?

I have thought too long to be capable of decision, answered the philosopher. The two sides of a shield look alike. Howe is made otherwise, he must speak. John!

Slowly, very slowly, it seemed to the impatient outlaw, the weeping men disengaged themselves.

What is it, sir? asked John, when he could master his voice.

Our fate is in your hands, John; it is yours to tell this good man what we're to do. Decide.

Decide?

Decide!

Then, said John, summoning courage to the aid of a collapsed dignity, I reckon I will speak my mind plainly, Mr. Henderson. I have broken bread with you, and while I have had no wine, I must thank you for your kind intentions. But I do not like your system, nor your government. In my part of the South, sir, we may have used slavery, but we won't be slaves. I'm not going to have business for a master, nor run my life by a schedule. I've got too much religion to be ground down by morality, and too much feeling to want

success. As soon as ever I heard you talking about your high principles, and your loyalty, I knew there was something wrong. So you can rob your banks, and hold up your trains without us. I won't go down to the law, and I won't knuckle in to the outlaw. All I want is a chance to run. Thank you, sir, but fire your signal and be damned to you!

That's talkin', assented Mr. Aliment, considerably heartened by these brave words.

Is it possible! ejaculated Mr. Henderson. You spurn success, progress, and democracy! By rights I should exterminate you; but I'm growing soft. Already my men suspect me. My sparing Aliment, a few days since, was to them an unjustifiable weakness, only to be accounted for by supernatural intervention or thaumaturgy. They have attributed his salvation to a word in the good old song which my Harvard friend was magnanimous enough to sing. Boo is, to them, magic, and belongs in that sacred category in which Liberty, Push, Cash, and Dynamite have long reigned supreme. Because of that song, that generous college spirit, I cannot bear to kill you. But

because of my overmastering patriotism, my fundamental loyalty to sacred institutions, I must fire the signal that makes you forever among the hunted in this region. However, I will remain here and give you the opportunity to flee for your lives between two opposing forces. My men are under orders not to shoot. But in their youthful enthusiasm, their love of equality and justice, they will, beyond peradventure, cast some hard stones, and fling the firebrands of everlasting contempt. Go!

Raising the hand in which, for many painful moments, he had been toying with a grim engine of destruction, he fired three shots into the air.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AMAZING GIANTS OF THE STONE MORTAR



OW the moon was at full, and the light shone round about them, so that John was not minded to sleep, and he went a little way beyond, where he could see the topmost peak of clear quartz gleaming in the night like an altar of alabaster. And he walked until he came upon a dome-like rock where he thought to sit down and watch the procession of the stars and drink in the almost agonizing beauty of the scene about him; but, as he stooped, he beheld a strange vessel on the top of the rock, and when he took it up in his hands and held it close he saw that it was a bowl, fashioned after the manner of a chemist's mortar. His hands told him that it was made of stone, but by the light of the moon it seemed like bronze, and when he struck it, it rang with the sound

of a bell. On the sides of the bowl were the figures of an eagle, a tortoise, and a lewd thing which made him shudder; and turning it about he discovered that beneath the figures was a kind of writing that he could by no means read, but which he took to be the sign-writing of the Indians; and beside this, but more roughly cut into the vessel, were some words in Latin. In that strange light he was unable to make all of them out, but what he read filled him with loathing, and he returned the thing to its place on the rock. Doing this, his hand encountered yet another object, which he took up and found to be a pestle, so carved that, looked at from one end, it was a lingam, and from the other, a fish; and on this there was, in large capitals, the single word **AGLA**.

Whatever that means, he said aloud; and what is Latin doing here, in this region of wildness, and beside Indian writing on heathen vessels? It was more than he could understand.

Once more he took up the black mortar, and, reaching within, he picked out some

crystals that showed yellow-green beneath the moon; and from what he had read in an old book at home, he judged that they were bits of diadochus, a stone of potent charm and sinister history.

What an unlikely adventure, he thought. Here am I, John Howe, from a humble farm in the north of Georgia, standing at midnight on the top of a high mountain in Arkansas, holding a vessel, sacred to some barbaric worship, engraved with obscene Roman epithets, and containing crystals known only to the black magicians of the Orient. And, on top of it all, I'm driven from the ways of peace! By way of emphasis he clutched the pestle tightly and struck the bottom of the mortar a vigorous blow. There was a flash of blinding light, a noise as of distant thunder, and great black clouds, streaked with crimson, arose from within the vessel and covered the face of the sky.

John Howe dropped to his knees, and, when he was about to pray, he heard a loud voice from somewhere above calling out:

Segal, Segal, Adonai, Tetragammaton.

Three times these words were repeated in the manner of a chant, and then there appeared, from over the receding shoulders of Orion, four vast figures which, in the distance, bore some resemblance to men, but which, as they drew near, were of such massive proportions that they obscured themselves by their own limbs, and blotted out the face of the moon. And when they were over the top of the peak, they flung out great rolls of satin, that stretched away beyond the edge of the earth; and they made paths toward the four points of the compass:—one of crimson, like the heart of fire; one of green, like Chinese jade; one of yellow, like the wild honeysuckle; and one as blue as cobalt.

Then there appeared, from north, and south, and east and west, a multitude of people, marching in procession across the sky, and they seemed of all races and ages of mankind, and the sound of their chanting filled the heavens; and while John Howe was observing these things, a bird with a body like that of a dove, but with a bright green tail, as long and flowing as that of a bird of Paradise,

rose, and with a plaintive cry, flew over his head; and it hovered over the gleaming mountain altar as though suspended by a thread.

Before the altar bronze-faced priests prostrated themselves, and one of them made about it a ring of fifty and two stones. And the priests were clad in robes of white, strewn with black flowers, and they wore capes bordered with red crosses. And those that assisted them brought up ripe fruits and plants, the like of which John had never seen, and laid them before the altar. Came then yet other holy men, leading a score of virgins by knotted cords drawn through their pierced tongues. And the virgins were offered up for sacrifice. Then, while the priests did pray, a curtain of cloud came down, and they were hid from view.

A million times, it seemed, the curtain was lifted, and a million times it fell; and each time that it rose there were new celebrants, clothed in strange vestments. Some wore crosses such as John Howe had seen; on some there were little circles at the top of the

cross; some wore no crosses at all, but, in their stead, inverted deltas, stars, lotus flowers, and rings; and some carried objects that made him wish to hide his face for very shame.

Prayers were uttered in a thousand tongues, and the sacrifices were of divers sorts,—huge bunches of grapes, sheaves of golden grain, blood-red wine, white-fleeced lambs, and fluttering doves, sleek heifers and bellowing bullocks which lowered their heads. Maidens came singing to the altar whence their souls were to be returned to the gods for the protection of the people; young men, straight and slim, swarthy or fair, stood in stolid silence and awaited their turn. Branches of oak and mistletoe, and cones from fir and pine were cast into the flames by worshipers. And those who assisted about the altar fed the communicants with cakes in the shape of men, and gave them to drink from a cup of gold, inlaid with precious stones.

Once the altar-rock clave asunder with a loud noise, and a man with dazzling light about his head sprang forth and drove a jeweled dagger into the heart of a bull.

Thereupon was much rejoicing among the worshippers, who fell upon their faces and offered thanksgiving.

And to John, who knew but little concerning these things, it seemed that the rituals, as they were done, were but plays of initiation into some profound secret of suffering and sorrow, followed by deliverance and ecstasy.

For the initiates danced and sang until they were frenzied with joy; and their eyes were uncovered, so that they beheld things ineffable, and too blessed to be put into words; too sacred for them that did not worship nor share a oneness with their god.

Thus John saw the mysteries of all the ages enacted before him on a lonely mountain-top above the clouds; and he would have comprehended nothing had not one of the giants stooped and ripped away the rim of the fourth dimension, so that the knowledge of these things came to him, and he knew of the terror and the hiddenness of all rituals and of all faiths; and that knowledge brought him great suffering, and he strove against it; but Death forced him, and he understood, not

through his eyes nor his ears nor any of his senses; rather, he seemed in the presence of an Incomprehensible which, as he afterwards phrased it, oozed into him from all sides, so that he comprehended in spite of himself; and he cried out in pain.

Now he knew the altars of the Toltecs and Aztecs, bearing their weight of intolerable sacrifice. He saw Lingam and Asher, Istar and Siva, and was conscious of their peculiar incense. There also were Osiris, Athor, Il, Astoreth, Priapus, Krishna, Dionysos, Jehovah, and Quetzalcoatl,—with faces that were fierce and passionate, or cold and impassive, according to the racial moods of their creators. And John came to see that back of their making was the everlasting hunger for love and beauty, or a soul-chilling fear of life; and, because of this, his heart was cast down in sadness and pity for the children of men.

But there were moments in every ritual which was enacted, and in every mystery-play that was performed, where, in the eyes of those who ministered, as in the hosts of them that held communion, he beheld the light of

spiritual drunkenness which told him more than their cries of joy.

There came also, walking across the sky from the east, One who was bowed with sorrow and who bore upon His back a cross. And as He drew near the air became heavy with myrrh and frankincense, and John inclined his head and made the gesture of reverence. And disciples followed from afar, and when dark clouds threatened and the thunder rolled, they trembled and drew back,—and some fled, so that His sorrow was increased. But those who followed later were more fearful than the first; and when they were met together on the mountain top, took issue with their forerunners concerning the rites which they did, so that argument gave way to strife,—and none took care that the burden should be lifted from Him whom they seemed to follow. And at last they forgot Him altogether in the mad business of disputing about the pronunciation of His name. And the curtains fell once more, and the curses of these men could not be heard.

Then arose, from the four quarters of the

heavens, a mighty din like the grinding of chains and the beating of brass. So infernal was the sound thereof that John's ears were like to burst. The clanking and smashing of metal was the new ritual, and in place of sweet incense there now came the stink of smoke and mineral oil. Out of black billows issued the new gods, and they were more hideous than anything John Howe had ever seen; and in the stead of *Te Deums* and *Custodi me domine* the worshipers shouted nasal hallelujahs about something that sounded like progress; and instead of their beads they told off coins of copper and tin. They that bowed before these monsters wore masks, the painted eyes of which seemed to yearn after the broken god who had just departed; but their lips were twisted into a leer.

Then the new gods drew near, and John perceived that the jaws of one were made of steel, of another bronze, and at every joint of their lean, black fingers was a great bolt of metal from which there seeped a thick brown grease, like the soft lye soap in use at Potter's

Corner. On the helmet of one was the word *Commercior*, and he had a look of cunning; on another was written *Industrior*, and he was cruel; the third was headless, short and fat, and carried a monstrous great sword, and his single rolling eye was in the pit of his stomach. Across the navel of this god were the letters *D-E-M-O-S*, and his sword was called *Leveller*; for when his obscene eye beheld, in the multitude, one head higher than another, it was his pleasure to cut it off—for the sake of symmetry, said one disciple; no, for the sake of harmony, corrected another.

And John saw that when these gods breathed there was death; the flowers faded away, and even the trees withered and died. But smoke and cinders increased. Now and again one of the greater persons of this diabolical trinity would stoop, and, with a single movement of his jaws, would devour a mighty forest, whilst the other would sink his fangs into a velvety green hill, and, with a sucking sound, would drain it of substance so that it melted away into a wrinkled heap of

unlovely earth. While these things were taking place, he whom they called Demos took care that no head was thrust up high enough to see all that was done; and from their hinderparts the chief gods dropped down metal tokens and curious toys which the devout named Moderncomforts, and which kept the multitude scrambling in an effort to secure them.

Just call me Dem, encouraged Demos, shouting from somewhere in his stomach; and the big guy you can call Dusty.

So democratic! Such fellowship! cried the people. It's just like having stock in the corporation. So inspiring!

Then, up the mountain side, there came three wise men, clad in strange robes, and one of them had a necklace of human fingers, and his garment was brodered with bones; and all of them bore curious vessels. And as they climbed they sang:

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.”



*"With a single movement of his jaws he would devour
a mighty forest."*

It is time, said the first, to call up the God of the Earth, whose name may not be mentioned.

If he has a name, amended the second.

If he exists at all, said the third. It was evident that much wisdom had made them utterly miserable.

We will try the sacred spell, said the first, with finality.

Scientific formula, corrected the second.

But what good does anything ever do? queried the third, who seemed a petulant fellow.

It gratifies a noble, philosophic curiosity, explained the second.

We will now mix the *aurum potabile*, the oil of sulphur, the *astrum horizontale*, and make the great precipitation, commanded the first.

There was a sound of mixing heavy liquids. Curious smells pervaded the place, and after a little time a green vapor began to rise above the rim of the first man's bowl. Call now the sacred words! he ordered.

And the three wise men began doubtfully

(for they believed nothing), and with some embarrassment to chant:

Osthariman, Visantiparos, Nocatur. But such was their skepticism that they avoided looking at one another for shame.

Suddenly one of them turned with a scream: Look!— Ugh! The sound died in his throat.

For there, thrusting itself up out of solid rock, came a hairy, serpent-like creature, whose grinning head was now outlined against the setting moon, and whose monstrous hands were clutching at the clear-cut cavern's mouth. Its lecherous eyes were hungry with an ancient passion, and there arose a stench as of slime from the sea.

I have come from the bowels of the earth at the behest of the Three Words and the Magic Drink, it began. Who loved me enough to call?

But the three trembling wretches who had brought about this miracle of science, turned and fled.

Then did the God of the Earth laugh with such lewd mirth that John felt the very

marrow of his bones turn to ice, whilst the god winked at the moon. Up and up rose the head of the serpent creature, until it could look into the most distant valleys and behold the doings of all mankind, and as it looked its grin widened to the tip of its hairy ears. But when it turned about and beheld Demos, Mart, and Industrior, mirth was turned, suddenly, into contempt:

The mungle goo is on the grass
The lisping mills go—Tweet!
The people are a sorry ass,
But, I hate the smell of your feet!

—sang the god. There was a convulsive movement in its sinuous throat, a gargling sound, and then, the god spat. And lo, the other gods were crumpled into three separate heaps of red rust, as fine as sifted ashes. Once more his face widened into a grin of satisfaction, and then with vast, spatulate fingers he reached forth, and, grasping the worshipers around the altars, held them high above his head.

Ha! Ha! he cried, and with another wink he crushed the helpless ones as though they

had been gooseberries, and their wine-red blood poured down between his fingers into an expectant mouth. Good! said he, wiping his hands on the fur of his neck, so much for that incident.

You devil! shouted John, starting up from the rock.

Bah! grunted the god, with a twisted smile, they are better off than they were. They're going to be once more reduced to a natural state, and refresh the heart of the earth.

You might have satisfied your anger on the gods alone, muttered Howe.

The reptilian reached forth, and with clumsy groping fingers picked up a coin. Their real gods still exist, said he, holding up the bit of metal. Mortals never care for noumenon if they can have the phenomenon; soul is a word they utter to conceal their love of brass. But I forget my dignity. By rights I should never explain to a curious man. So, for the impertinence of being in the wrong place, and, if I may lower myself by a further elucidation, for your future peace of mind—it seemed to John that for a moment the

creature smiled most benevolently—take that! One of the great fingers made a flicking gesture; there was a blinding impact, above the sound of which could be heard a final note of mocking laughter. . . . Darkness fell.

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Nothin' more than a stone bruise! snorted Mr. Aliment in contempt.

And that on your cheek is no more than an abrasion, acquired during our somewhat awkward flight; the blister on your forehead, to which you attach so much importance, was no doubt occasioned by a coal from one of the firebrands which those villains threw at us, suggested Mr. Tessaract, with a weary shrug of his thin shoulders. We were too excited to notice these things at the time.

But here is a piece of the bowl, with writing on it, John maintained stoutly. Neither excitement nor robbers made that.

True, agreed Mr. Tessaract, taking the fragment into his hands, but it is conceivable that you may have picked this up just before you lay down. You were too exhausted to give

it much attention with the conscious mind, and when you fell asleep the sub-conscious did the rest. You see, he went on, turning the bit of pottery about in his fingers, the symbol here is that of a tortoise head, and the words beneath—evidently engraved much later—are, Priapus ere . . . and their suggestiveness was sufficient, under the circumstances, to produce a violent nightmare.

But how did Latin come to Arkansas? Howe challenged a bit sullenly,—for his faith was beginning to weaken before so many formidable words.

You forget the French missionaries, cried the philosopher; and when one remembers that these pious men, more often than not, used Indians for their assistants about the altar, it is not surprising that a heathen mortar should have done temporary service as a Christian censer, and that, later, some wag-gish priest, having divined the phallic symbolism engraved upon this sacred utensil, thereunder inscribed its familiar classic name.

Damnably blasphemous! muttered Howe.

In both cases this humble relic was of ser-

vice in a religion of love, Tessaract went on, and no doubt the offices of the second faith purified it of its more literal and primitive significance.

Scholarship makes dirty minds, said John.

Merely interprets them, my boy; but in all events, we have here a fascinating memento which may serve forever to remind us of the strange uses of the past.

All this palaver over an old pot! spat out Aliment, eying the fragment with manifest scorn. If I'm not wrong in my guess, folks didn't used to talk about such vessels in public. Let's get down out of here!

CHAPTER IX

A CHORUS OF PISMIRES



L IQUOR up, boys! liquor up! 'lection's young, and you'll need somethin' to fortify yer nerves. What'll it be, sir?

—Sloe gin sour; Bourbon; Rickey; Scotch; Bud; an' a Manhattan.

'Nother shot o' rye.

Right ye are, Jedge. Evenin', Bud.

I tell ye this country's goin' to the dawgs, with niggers gittin' so set up. Damn Republicans can't honey 'em up enough in Washington. A feller can't walk the streets no mo. What do they know about the nigger problem?

—A feller was tellin' me t'other day that this administration had wasted a hunnerd million dollars jest a projeckin' aroun' with what they call Reclamation. More like damnation, I say; stan'in' in with them Wall Street slicks. . . .

Ten to one they don't carry the West. Ten to one! Ain't my money good?

—You c'n take my word fer it, gen'elmen, if Squash gits in agin', peanuts won't bring five cents a bushel, and they'll be a throwin' hawgs in the river fer to get rid of 'em. Look the way craps has been the last two year; no corn, and boll weevil's eatin' up the cotton. I tell ye, hit's suicide, that's what hit is.

—It's a powerful quiet 'lection, Bob. Ain't like the good ole days. Seems like people ain't got no principle. . . . Oh yes, they was four kilt over in the seventh ward, and they was some fist fightin'; but nothin' to tell of. Why in '84 . . .

—Right up this way to the polls, gentlemen.

—I don't live here. I'm from Georgia, and my friends are strangers, too.

Too bad! But Georgia's a fine state. Don't make 'em better, less'n its Alabam. But say! You're a Democrat, ain't ye? We kin fix it up, I reckon. A man ortent to lose his vote. . . .

Aw hell! If a man can't juggle a little fer the sake of his country, what's the use? Well,

if you feel that way, you ort to stayed at home at a time like this. . . . A travelin' man? What line o' goods do ye carry?

—Ideals.

Ideals? What kinda jewelry's that? Don't want that kinda stuff around here. Little joke, eh?

—Shh! Come over here.

You're Republicans, ain't ye? Aw, ye can't fool me! 'Course it ain't agzactly safe in this ward to vote for the Grand Old Party, but if you'll come around to the Fifth . . .

Say, listen here! We got to make a showin' here in Larom. If we was to get a Democrat in now, we'd all be a starvin' in six months. Look at the prosperity we got, protectin' our own industry, and tendin' to business. We're the richest country in the world. The richest in the world!

—If it wasn't for the niggers, I might agree with you.

But now listen here! The niggers have got a right to vote the same as you an' me have. Ain't it the law and the Constitution? It ain't right to keep 'em away from the polls just be-

cause they air Republicans. That ain't right now, is it, Mr. er-a?

—Howe.

—Mr. Howe? And I can see you air a fair minded man.

But we've got to protect our women.

A look of alarm passed over the face of the Republican. Say, I'd argue with ye, but there comes Charley Johnson, and he's kinda lit up. I don't want no shootin'. Come around to the Fifth. Not afeard, ye understand, but it's the principle. . . .

—You kin get votes from them bums around the depot for a beer and a five cent cigar. Fellers that work inside come a little higher. Haskins has just run in a couple a hundred fer that old stock a hats he's been trying to sell fer the last ten years. We got to buy five hundred more and we got two hundred bucks to do it with. Easy!

—Come in, boys, and have a drink. We got great problems to solve; big issues. Ole Squash must be squashed, or this here republic is doomed. . . .

—Bourbon; two Rye; one Scotch.

—And big problems demand big men with big brains. That's what your nominees have got,—brains. The ordinary man can't solve these here questions of tariff and the like. Say, Buck, put that record of Senator Filbert's on the phonygraph. Wonderful invention, that! Canned voice, as the sayin' is. Now you'll hear some brainy oratory:

—Laydees and gentlemen-n-n. It takes my breath away to stand before such a vast assemblage of noble manhood and to be surrounded by the far-famed beauties of your illustrious city! Fairer women nor more stalwart men never breathed. . . . What a word is mother! Every man here had a mother!

A mother is a mother still,
The holiest thing alive,

sang the immortal Shakespeare.

—But I come, not to entertain you with tender sentiments, but to bring to your attention the most colossal and criminal blunders that were ever perpetrated on a great and glorious nation. . . . Ten million milk-

weeds were permitted, by this iniquitous administration, to flower in the state of Kansas alone. Forty billion grasshoppers attacked the crops of the great state of Texas. What did our government do? Echo answers. Look at the great cross-tie scandal! Three hundred and forty-one cross-ties have not been accounted for by the Secretary of the Interior! It is a crying shame. They promised prosperity and gave us nothing but grasshoppers. . . . And what do we propose, you ask: To cut down expenses; to restore cross-ties to a normal price, and to unearth the unsavory scandal that caused this nation to lose so much of its national resources; to give you an honest government and low taxes; to abolish milkweed and grasshoppers; to send every farmer a package of Tumkin's Terrific Turnip Seed, and to restore Mother, Home, and Heaven to their rightful position on the topmost peak of human sentiment. . . .

Now ain't that oratory! Filbert is sure a great thinker. He ain't stuck up neither, fer all his quotin' Shakespeare. A plain man of the people. Started out in the saw mill busi-

ness, and rose to the Senate. How a man can vote the Republican ticket after hearin' that beats me!

Hooray for the Democrats! I'm a goin' to vote for 'em.

—So'm I.

—So'm I.

—Me too.

But I heard a Republican record acrost the street. Durned if it wasn't oratory too. Said the Democrats had sold out to the Pope.

Say! Is that so? Well, I ain't goin' to vote for 'em then.

—Nor me.

—Nor me.

—Me neither.

I don't know what to think.

Have you heard the Socialist record? Everything free, veg'table dinner pail, no work; just press a button and let the machinery do it. . . . They ain't no crime; everybody's as good as everybody else, and let the majority do all the thinkin'.

But has the majority any brains?

—Say, what's your name?

—Tessaract, at your service.

—Another one of these damn foreigners; if you don't like this country, get out!

—You might mind your manners, John suggested.

—Look a here, all men are equal, and I've got a right to just as bad manners as I damn please!

—My mistake, said John.

Make way for the girls, there, make way! Boys, you can take your pick; if you'll accompany one of these beauties to the polls and vote for us, you can have her till morning. Step lively! That's it!

—Don't be taken in, boys! Here's a better string of women,—two of 'em for one vote. This way!

—Women ortint to be in politics. It's too deep for 'em. It's a man's job.

—What's the use a changin' the administration?

—What's the use? Why, ain't you got no vision? It's progress, that's what it is; and progress is change, new jobs for new men. Keeps money circulatin'. You're one of these

pessimists. For God's sake boost, don't knock.

—Bourbon; Rye; Tap; Dry Gin. Agzactly!

—Let's get out where we can get some air, said John.

The park bench by the grandstand was sticky with fresh paint, and the night air was crisp; but one could look up and be companioned by Cassiopeia, and behold, on the mighty shoulders of Taurus, the glittering Pleiades.

Mr. Aliment heaved a sigh of relief as he settled himself. John looked wistfully at familiar constellations.

The scene from which we have just removed ourselves is a fitting testimony to the greatness of human nature in responding to the demands of state, observed Mr. Tesseract, extending his legs. How joyfully each man takes his share in upholding our sacred institutions! How eagerly he approaches the problems from which timid sages have fled! What a refutation these earnest citizens provide against the sneers of aristocrats! The

common people, in triumph, drag forward the car of civilization.

Drag is right, said Aliment, nodding.

Must be a funeral car, from the looks, said John.

—It is true that I was so ill-mannered as to mention brains a moment since; and for that impertinence I was most justly rebuked. For, after all, what is the merit of brains, that they should defile politics? Brains enter so little into the affairs of men as to be rendered negligible. If our fathers had used their brains, would we have been born? Nay! Does a man reason concerning the woman of his destiny? Does thought enter into love? If it were so this planet would be as barren as the moon, and this fair city as the wastes of the desert. Was logic ever a welcome guest at a banquet? That board would be cheerless indeed! And with analysis picking at our food, and peering into our drink, appetite would depart forever. And as for our churches, whenever brains mount the pulpit stairs, religion hides behind the altar. Why, then, should a churlish mortal invoke the

stranger, Reason, at the festivals of civic enterprise?

'Scuse me, gentlemen, but if you all don't mind, could I set down here for a little while? came a timid voice from out the shadows.

Certainly, responded Howe, who was eager to put an end to Tessaract's self castigations.

Everybody's so wrought up over the 'lection that I couldn't find a soul to listen to my troubles this evenin'. . . . But I don't want to bother you?

Not at all, said John, suddenly sympathetic. What's wrong?

It isn't exactly me, it's my brother, Alfred, began the stranger.

Brothers have the trouble habit, Aliment put in.

—He came to me for advice this mornin', and I just don't know what to say. He's in a bad fix.

For every trouble under the sun
There's a remedy or there is none.
If there be one go try to find it,
If there be none, never mind it.—

quoted John, in comforting tones.

It's like this, began the stranger, drawing forth a huge pocket knife and proceeding to whittle as an accompaniment to his tale.

It seemed that brother Alfred, being unable to take advantage of those cultural opportunities which had inspired the narrator to become a traveling instructor of vocal music, had been forced to adapt himself to the more menial duties of a farm hand. Though nature had not endowed him with remarkable energy, he had contrived, with an almost incredible swiftness, to get disengaged from more than a score of jobs within the space of a single year. Then, at last, he had met the Widow Crane. From a deceased relative, Mrs. Crane had acquired ninety acres of red land, which, until Alfred's arrival, had promised to yield little other than persimmon sprouts and saw briars; under his supervision the place acquired the dignity of a real farm. Something about the widow's personality had suddenly awakened the young man from years of lethargy and transformed him into a human dynamo. As a reward for his extraordinary efforts he was to receive two

dollars a week and his board. Furthermore, at the end of the season, he was to get five per cent of the net profits from the crops. It was an ideal situation.

But Mrs. Crane was fastidiously particular. Her four-room house was far away from the nearest neighbor, and it was, therefore, necessary that she, a lone widow, keep the young assistant beneath her roof. To do this, in the ordinary way, was incompatible with her sense of decency. The house must be cut in half by means of a heavy partition; a combined dining room and kitchen must be built in the rear, in order that her own quarters be undefiled. A woman can't be too keerful of her reputation, she averred.

She was mindful of propriety in all her ways. Being a clean-minded, American widow, the flesh signified to her mind that hypothetical pleasure arising from promiscuous manual juxtaposition. Being a wholesome, Southern boy, it meant just the same to Alfred; both shared an aversion to handshaking between persons of opposite sex. Mrs. Crane declared that people should avoid such

exercises until they were safely married, and then only as a duty to God and their country. Thus it was that books mentioning not only hands, but even fingers, fingernails, manicuring, fingerbowls, nail files, or gestures which, in any way, involved the forearm and its appendages, were revolting to her. That her hands might not be seen by unlawful eyes, she wore gloves. Had it been practicable, she would have preferred baseball gloves; they resembled the figleaf. Indeed, to her way of reasoning, the sacred symbolism attached to that leaf arose from its likeness to a baseman's mit.

Aliment, being of an impatient nature, here objected that he did not see how such pure minded people could ever get into trouble.

You don't know what gossip will do to folks, said John, recalling the tragedies of his own community.

Alas, sighed Mr. Tessaract, who had not followed the story as carefully as he might, such is the quality of Ill Fame that it insures its perpetuity by fastening itself upon the back of Rumor, whose indefatigable feet, moving

with the fleetness of a fawn, bear their burden of iniquity, to all the haunts of men.

—Hit wasn't gossip that done it, said the stranger, hit was nature. . . .

Poor human nature! How frail. . . .

—No, it wasn't human nature; hit was old Mother Nature herself. Two days ago there was a big tornado in the west end of the county. Hit come up in the night. Pore Alfred, just when it looked like he was headed for prosperity, and when it seemed that most any day him and the Widow Crane might have a legal handshake, along comes the storm. They was asleep, all locked up, and with that strong pertition standin' there to keep 'em from all evil, when, bang smash! that there tornado picked up the walls of the house and ripped 'em right off the floor just at the same time as it picked up the barn. Did you ever see one of these here tin horn gamblers lift the shells off'n peas at a county fair? Well, sir, that's the way the storm done; and hit just swapped the top and sides of the barn for the top and sides of the house. Never even moved the furniture nor the mules. But

the fust thing they knowed them mules was lookin' at the pictures on the wall, and Alf was smellin' the stable and rakin' the hay out of his eyes. Then he heard the widow let out a screech. He couldn't holler out to ask her if she was hurt, because he didn't have any pants on; and she couldn't say nothin' till she found her gloves,—so they was in suspense fer a long time, messin' 'round in the dark. When the widow finally got her gloves and lighted the lamp, she did raise a catawampus; the partition was gone, and her and Alf was barely separated by stalls! Have you got on all your clothes? she yelled, first thing; if you have, are you alive and all right?

Alf had to fumble around considerable before he had on enough garments to answer that he was still kickin'. What's the matter? he says. The world's come to an end or somethin', she says, and we can't be caught in this way. It's night, and you must get out. If the Lord's comin', I want to be alone and above suspicion, she says; I've lived pure so long, that I'm not goin' to lose my soul over a matter of a few minutes in a mule stall.

All right, says Alf, I'll get out soon as I can find the door.

See if the moon's runnin' blood, she says, kinda calmin' down like, seein' that nothin' more happened and she didn't hear the angel choir. If the moon looks natural, see if the stock's alive.

When Alf finally got outside he seen that the clouds was past, and old terry firmy was still right side up, so he wasn't so scared. But just then he heered somebody groan, and he run around and stumbled over a fat man lying plumb against the chicken coop. He picks him up and drags him over to the pump fer to make him come to, when he hears somebody else begin to groan; and by gum! there was another feller lyin' against what ust to be the smoke house. So he picked him up,—him bein' thin and light, and totes him over to the pump.

There's two men hurt out here! he calls to the widow. You'd better come out and fetch the liniment and brandy, he says, pumpin' away. I'm revivin' 'em.

Well, sir, by the time she got around to

comin' out, them fellers was a sittin' up. And when she come up and seed the fat un she drapped the liniment and busted it right on the ground. William! she says. Then she took a look at t'other. Ezry! At that she spilt the brandy, and keeled over. Hit wuz a sight.

Well sir, hit appears that both them men was her husbands, at one time or another, and both had left and run off and give out that they was dead. And here she was a Mormon; and her a thinkin' she was a good Baptist! By the time the sun got up there was such quarrelin' and fussin' as you never heerd tell of. Bill was all for leavin' at onct; but when Ezry began to ask about the farm, and the improvements, and said he was goin' to settle down and make a livin' for her, Bill up and says that it's his duty to stay and look after her interests.

Alf seen that his hopes was all crushed, so he told the widow that if she didn't mind he'd take his wages and clear out.

Wages! she says. You ungrateful scamp, how can you have the face to ask for wages at

a time like this, with troubles rainin' round my head, and me all un-widowed so sudden?

So Alf, seein' how the land was lyin', sneaked round the back way, behind what ust to be the house, and lit out for town. His spirit is clean broke, pore boy! He just can't understand why, with all them husbands, she was so keerful about her gloves.

It is utterly beyond my comprehension, confessed Mr. Tessaract.

But what about his wages? inquired Aliment.

That's what I was a comin' to. I'm no collector, and Alf says he won't go back fer a million dollars. Everybody's so tuck up with these great political questions, that I can't git no help. I wisht you gentlemen . . .

Across the street arose a great tumult. Cries resounded from all over the city. Hoots, groans and curses, could be heard above the sound of revolver shots.

Somebody's elected! cried Alf's brother, leaping to his feet in momentary forgetfulness of his troubles. Wait a minute and I'll find out.

Does it matter who it is? But John addressed the question to a rapidly disappearing back.

How can you give utterance to such a sentiment, after the passionate discourses we have been privileged to hear this evening? Tessaract reproved. Mutation is necessary to growth. Change is the law of life. Always things have moved. Emperor has succeeded emperor; war followed war. Civilization has gone down that it might be succeeded by civilization. We are accused of being corrupt, but our age is no worse than the ones before the birth of Christ. And we have had intervening changes that have enriched the memories of mankind. History has grown, and events have multiplied. What yesterday could have been told in a single volume, to-day requires a hundred. You may say that the events repeat themselves, but I reply that it is better to have moved in a circle than never to have moved at all. I go further. We have improved. We may move in the same circle that the Pharaohs trod, but we, in this enlightened age of machinery, know

how to move faster. It used to take a nation hundreds of years to pass from birth to death; now it can be done in a day. Moreover, let me remind you that change supplies the element of suspense to a humanity starving for romance. A new ruler may mean success by economy or by aggression; failure by sword or famine. The people enjoy the suspense. It is a marvelous tonic.

Squash is re-elected! announced Aliment, who had followed the stranger a little way into the madly excited crowd, and they are shootin' the Republicans for celebratin'.

What a relief! exclaimed Mr. Tessaract. The other man would have no doubt been worse. The country is saved. Now we can devote ourselves entirely to Alfred and his widow.

No! said John, with more firmness than was his habit. If you do, you go alone. But as for me, I am tired of events. I want to go where things don't happen. If we wait till that man comes back he will move my sympathy for Alfred and get me to try to collect his debts. It would be just like me to fall.

If I go to the widow, she'll cry and I'll be sorry for her and want to whip Alf or those wind-blown husbands. I'm leaving, this minute, for the northeast road that leads to my Georgia home, where I can hear the crickets sing in peace, and where the red muscadines are waiting to be picked, and where there's a girl I love among the red azaleas. What I've seen and heard in the world outside has so dried up the springs of my heart that I haven't written a poem in all these months. I came away to find mystery and beauty and love: I left love and beauty and mystery in my own mountains. I've seen all that I can bear, and my gain is that I'll be satisfied at home where I can be near her. And if I can't have her, I can hear her voice sometimes, and maybe the day will come when I can bear her burdens. That's the only kind of burdens I'm aching to bear, and I'm going home.

And now, gentlemen, you've been friends to me, and companions, so my home is your home, if you care to follow me; and we can work together under the sun to get our bread

from the ground, and talk together by the light of the fire to refresh our souls.

That's what I call bein' a gentleman and havin' common sense all in one, cried Aliment. Thank you, John! I'm with you.

Lead on, my friend, said Mr. Tesseract; if I were an incorporated university, I should now be willing to declare you a Master of Arts.

CHAPTER X

THE CAVE OF CLAUNECK



AFTER reaching Bryant's Gap there was no checking either his enthusiasm or his eager footsteps. The narrow divide had been crossed at mid-afternoon of a day whose morning had seen earth's crust puffed out with icy frost, whose slanting sun, at noon had turned the crackling surface into mire, and whose light was now fast fading into lean gray shadows. Aliment and Tes-saract, weary from twenty miles of heavy tramping, pleaded that they should make camp for the night, but John, breathing familiar scents, stirred by many an ancient landmark, and longing to see once more the gods of his hearthstone, paid little heed to their entreaties.

There are two fat feather beds at home, said he, and up under the rafters I know where there's a keg of good old liquor. And with

that word of encouragement he quickened his pace.

They were skirting the forest at the foot of the mountains now, and below them were the indeterminate lines of rail fences that were supposed to mark the boundaries of Egypt's Valley farms. Looks like they've had a good season, said John, pointing to the bulging corn shocks that had been left standing in a nearby field. That was Grandpa Dill's place. Over there, where the smoke's rising, is Potter's Corner. And do you see those mounds in that pasture? Well, that's where the Indians used to camp, and they say that before they left they buried a lot of silver around under their graves. Old Sol Renfro took a divining rod over there and it whirled around and around and, finally, pointed straight to what they used to call the chief's mound—the one that's covered with all those trees. They never found anything but some old pipes and arrows, though. There's Bowen's pond. . . .

John, too happy to notice the indifference of his audience, went on to point out place

after place to which long absence had lent an added romance, over which fond association had spread its subtle glamour. Path after path they crossed—paths leading from the valley to mountain cabins screened by laurel and pine—and, at one, unseen of his companions, who were too weary to be watchful, John stooped, and, picking up a fallen, brown leaf, pressed it to his lips. It was the way down which Frances Miller was wont to make her way to the village.

At last they came upon the main road, washed as of old by every sudden mountain stream, and gleaming white out of the semi-darkness. For a moment John stood still, then, pointing to the dark object that sat back among the willows beyond, whispered rather than said:—

There, gentlemen, is home. Welcome!

Across the fence with a bound, he made his way around back of the barn to the garden gate, where, as if petrified with amazement, he came to a dead stop, staring blankly at the house before him.

For things were somehow, unaccountably,

transformed. The roof, which of old had been green-gray with its burden of moss, was now checkered by the insertion of new-cut shakes; the little window under the eaves no longer wore its patch of log cabin quilt; the broken panes through which the wind had used to sigh and moan were replaced by polished glass; here and there a warped weather-board had been clamped in place by a well driven nail. The yard had been cleared of weeds, and the curving path was bordered with shrubbery; the lilac showed the touch of pruning shears, as did the leaning apple tree, which was now companioned by three rows of vigorous young saplings. Whitewash gladdened the palings of a garden whose trim tomato frames gave evidence of a season's careful cultivation. Such neatness had not pervaded the place since his mother's death.

This looks good to me, grunted Aliment. What are we waiting for?

It is to be expected that one who has for so long a time absented. . . .

Sh! cautioned John in a whisper, I believe that somebody's living here; in fact I know it.

Do you see that glow through the window?
. . . I reckon we'd better be moving along.

I'll be damned if I do! cried Aliment, who was not to be denied some rewarding comfort for the hardships which his host's impetuosity has compelled him to endure. I've been thinkin' about that feather bed too long to stay out in the cold another night.

And the brandy, murmured Mr. Tessaract, a little sadly.

Just come around here back of the barn a minute, please, John whispered, and I'll have a little talk with you.

Now look here, gentlemen, he began, when they were at a safe distance from the farm house, I owe you an apology for disappointing you, but how could I know that while I was gone somebody was going to take my house? I'm just as disappointed as you, and I'm ashamed that I can't keep my word. . . .

If it's your place, why can't you go and turn them out? I'll help you.

I implore you to do nothing violent, Mr. Tessaract pleaded.

I'm afraid you gentlemen don't appreciate

the temperament of this country, said John. And he explained to them how he had certain inherited enemies who did not look upon him with favor; how that, if the intruder were from among the mountain folk, it would be necessary, at all events, to shout a greeting before approaching the door; how that people who violated this nice point of etiquette were not infrequently called to a higher life without a moment's warning; and how, whether the present occupant were from the mountains or not, his motives as an injured property owner might be severely questioned, and might, therefore, lead to evil consequences. He could by no means permit his guests to suffer injury as a result of his carelessness; especially since the harm might be incurred beneath his own roof. He must come alone, in the morning light, and seek to adjust matters in a way conformable to the customs of the country.

Then I guess we'll just have to bed down in this old barn, said the disgusted Aliment, in a tone of regretful resignation.

But Howe counseled against this also. The

mountain folk did not relish sudden surprise. And if, in the early dawn, the present tenant found uninvited strangers reposing in the hay, he might be startled into using a rifle—a weapon which, in those parts, was handled with amazing accuracy.

Now there's a cave back here a little way in the side of the mountain, suggested the embarrassed host, which has a big dry room where we can make a little fire and be tolerably comfortable for a night or so. It's on my land, and if we can make out there for a while, I'll try to entertain you better, later on.

It took some protest to stir sore and sluggish feet into renewed activity, but when all the dangers of a too precipitate action were fully comprehended by the philosopher and his disciple, they once more set out upon the trail for a resting place.

I thought this was a safe country, where nothing ever happened, said Mr. Aliment.

There are little conventions peculiar to every locality, observed Mr. Tessaract. Without paying due respect to these formalities of conduct one is never safe.

By this time it was quite dark, and the tortuous mountain trail, familiar enough to remembering feet, made each step, for those who followed, an act of hesitant faith. Mr. Aliment was forced to lead his master by the hand, and was bravely exerting himself to follow the leader, when, with a great clatter of stones and crackling of twigs, came the inept warning cry,—Look out!

Recurring freezes and thaws had caused the narrow path to crumble away at one point, and Howe, unacquainted with the change, had plunged down the mountain side.

Now what the! exclaimed Aliment.

I seem to recall a Scriptural text, which, but for the sake of delicacy, would be a most appropriate quotation, said Tesseract.

Smothered profanity floated up from below.

He's all right, chuckled Mr. Aliment, restored to good humor by his host's misfortune.

Say! cried John, excitement making his voice vibrant. Strike a match and come down here! I've found such a cave as I never dreamed of!

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Bacon, broiled over a fire of twigs, and well flavored with ashes and wood smoke; pone corn bread, covered with drippings of fat, and toasted brown; black coffee made in a can—such fare may be scorned of those who live in comfortable clubs, and, truth to say, receives exaggerated praise from false prophets of the out-of-doors; but to them that dwell by the wayside, and make their nests in a barren cavern, that simple meal may transform brutality into benevolence and twist the snarl of dissatisfaction into a right tolerable smile. To that extent at least, mind is dominated by matter—as all wise women know.

I can't quite see how I ever missed it, for I've been over this ground hundreds of times.

Look at that pile of earth and stone, my friend. This cavern's mouth was hid by some freak of frost and sun, before you were born, no doubt; and what the elements concealed, it remained for them to reveal. Accident did the rest.

An armful of them leaves and my two blankets 'll make a pretty good substitute for a real bed, eh?

Always I have looked in this mountain for caves and I've found a good store, I reckon. This one isn't as big as the one we were headed for, but it's drier, and, from the looks, goes back a ways. We'll have to look around tomorrow. . . . Just to think, I can't get into my own home!

Come on. I can't get leaves for everybody.

The thinking man is surprised by nothing, reproved Mr. Tessaract, least of all by injustice. The wren returns to its ancestral abode to find it preëmpted by a sparrow.

That night, kneeling beside a cold stalagmite on the cavern floor, John offered up thanksgiving: For the illusions Thou hast permitted Thy servant to keep, I thank Thee, O Lord.

.

Dreams on a floor of stone whose covering is dust; dreams in a chill cavern where the drip, drip, drip of distant water from the sweating roof makes a liquid monotone throughout the night; dreams in a blackened, hollow-sounding vault, whose several yawn-

ing exits lead out to unknown depths of echo and wells of mystery—such dreams must ever hover on the threshold of an ecstasy of horror.

Lying helpless in the grip of some relentless palsy, incapable alike of speech or movement, with eyes fixed and staring, one watches the twisting viper lowered by a silken thread. Closer it comes, and the slow moving scales slide upon one another with every sinuous turn. Cold, glittering eyes stare back with unblinking diabolism, and the scarlet, forked tongue flicks downward with the promise of an agonizing kiss. The clammy folds now touch the cheek with frost, and softly twitch upon reluctant lips. Agh!

But surely it is the snake of paradise; for now the nostrils quiver in grateful reminiscence; vineyards along the sand-embanked Loire; fragrant inns of Tuscany; the sweet perfume of soul releasing grapes.

Life is returning. Fire goes through the veins, and warms the heart. One can move . . . What?

Tessaract sat up with ungraceful celerity, smacking his lips.

I just thought that'd fetch you around, chortled Mr. Aliment, who towered above, bearing a tin cup in his hand. Taste a swaller of that, and tell me that life ain't good, will you.

Um! Mr. Tessaract wiped the drops of sticky moisture from his cheek. So it was you, was it? Questionable taste, waking a man that way. You gave me an abominable nightmare. Good Lord! What was that liquid?

Do what I said, and you won't be so grouchy, Doc. Take a swig.

Skeptical at first, the philosopher sipped daintily; then, as though parched by a sudden drought, eagerly drained the cup. Mr. Aliment's loud guffaws echoed throughout the cavern.

Heavenly! No wonder I began to dream of paradise. Where did you get it?

Well, I was stirrin' around kinda early this mornin', and I thought to myself I'd like to see if we'd been sleepin' with bears and wildcats, explained Aliment, glad of an opportunity to create suspense by leisurely circumlocution. So I lighted my stub of a candle and

went pokin' around in first one of them holes and then another. There wasn't much but them shiny rock icicles—what d'ye call them?

Go on, my good man, go on. Come to the point, and leave stalactites for some other time.

Well sir, as I was sayin', I didn't find anything to speak of until I came back and got into that fourth hole. There was just another big room like this, with big round rocks on the floor, and I was startin' to turn around, when my foot struck against somethin' that sounded like wood. So I got down and looked; and blamed if it wasn't a barrel. It was sorta petrified on top, and I couldn't believe my eyes until I rolled it over and found the bung. There was another barrel, but I ain't opened that.

Two barrels of that divine claret! Good God! Lead me there at once!

What's all the trouble? inquired their sleepy host, lifting himself on one elbow and endeavoring to adjust his eyes to the new day.

Trouble? Trouble's banished forever. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the worthy

Aliment, here, is its announcing angel. He has just found two whole barrels of wine!

.

Ah! It is indeed wonderful; though, after drinking three cups, I would suggest that it stands in sad need of decanting. Have we deceived you, John, my boy?

But I can't account for it. They don't make stuff that tastes like that around here. How did it get here? Hand me that candle a minute, Aliment, will you?

Man is never content to take the blessings of Providence for what they are; he must always be reasoning about origins and proposing the eternal Why? More than half our unhappiness arises from the interrogation point; and more. . . .

Come here, look at this! I'll be durned! Using his sleeve for a dust cloth, John was peering excitedly at the faded letters on a foxed and mildewed label, tacked on one end of the precious cask. Bending over his shoulder the men made out, by the flickering light of the candle: Margeaux. 1858, Jno. Howe, Esq.

Your father?

My grandfather,—put in here to hide from the Yankees. Why there must be . . . Let's look around.

This other barrel is not so large.

Here, hold it a little closer. Ah, Peach brandy, 1851.

But what the devil is this? Why, this looks like an old hair trunk.

Treasure!

Open 'er up.

No, not here. Let's get it out where we can see.

If this moldering relic—which one day had been a fitting depository for fine lace and starched linen, and was now reduced to rotted staves and shreds of hide—had been the very Ark of the Covenant, it could not have been borne out into the sun-flooded chamber with a greater reverence. For to each man the rusted lock, which now could offer so little resistance to itching fingers, was a symbol of the unknown. Beneath the flimsy lid each man might, for the moment, image his inmost wish; for one man, wealth, which is the way

to comfort; for another, knowledge, which is the way to sorrow; for another, mystery, which is the way to joy.

And it was fated that, for this once, the idealist should come nearest the fulfilment of his wish. For the lifting of the hinged cover, laid bare, not family jewels, nor silver plate; but a heap of yellowed paper whose dank odor attested the fact that to many generations of field mice they had provided comfort. Here and there whole pages were intact; one roll of finely written manuscript had resisted rodent teeth save at its upper and lower edges, where it was indented like a woodman's saw; and, deep down among the tattered fragments, were two stained volumes whose stout calf binding yet bore the impress of the lettering tool: Nathaniel Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World*, done in 1678, and Simeon Leek's *Dreadful Prophecies, and Sundry Interpretations*, bearing the still earlier date, 1634. These, together with a lock of auburn hair, enclosed in a tarnished snuff box, were all that remained of Colonel John Howe's most intimate possessions.

With muffled regrets, Mr. Aliment turned back to the wine room.

We must not forget that we are guests, and that the precious nectar in that inner chamber is our host's new found heritage, warned Mr. Tessaract, who had visions of an arid future.

A man would be a poor disciple of Rabelais who did not bid his guests drink, said John.

I beg of you to drink, both wine and brandy to the very dregs. As for me, I reckon I have, in these papers, enough to make me drunk for weeks to come.

Thus, with brandy and Margeaux, reading and sleeping, the hours drew into days, and the cave dwellers knew neither sorrow nor care.

From Wanley they read of that enviable Cornish beggar whose simple epitaph contained the lines:

Here Brawne the quondam beggar lies,
Who counted by his tale
Some six score winters and above,
Such virtue is in ale.

Ale was his meat, his drink, his cloth,
Ale did his death deprive;
And could he still have drunk his ale,
He had been still alive.

And after Tesseract had read aloud, from *The Wonders*, how that Anna Erlandsonius gave birth to eggs, and another woman to a seven headed devil, John would recite the prognostications of Simeon Leek, or the yet more direful prophecies of his grandfather's sire, contained in the indented manuscript:

When all have liberty, freedom will die;
when all have freedom, a most monstrous
tyranny shall reign. Sad shall be the day when
the meek come to inherit the earth, for then
shall meekness and all modesty cease. When
slavery is no more, each man shall be the slave
of all, and the last state shall be worse than
the first. . . . Vulgarly rushes upon us with
each breath of reform. Woe! Woe! The dev-
ils laugh for joy.

It is evident that your ancestor was no true American, commented Mr. Tesseract; he showed no respect for bulk, magnitude, expansion. Today, the good citizen is content to

behold increase, and does not stop to ask what enlargement has been made. Men of that ancient stamp were concerned about impudence, and meekness, not realizing that with humility there can be no push; without impudence the plain man can get no hearing. Vulgarity is the sign-word of emancipation; reverence is the bludgeon of aristocracy. Your grandfather doubtless spoke often of the duties of a gentleman; but we stand at the dawn of a *new* day. With the coming of steam power and democracy, gentlemen lose their function; the very word is as inconceivable as the Sangraal. Fellow is the term that fits our modern age, and describes the status of a wholesome citizen.

You forget, sir, that Thomas Jefferson was the founder of our democracy, and that no finer gentleman ever breathed.

And you Southerners never forget to confuse the democratic party with democracy. Moreover, the historicity of Thomas Jefferson is exceedingly doubtful. He is believed to have been such another myth as Shakespeare or Homer. First, there is the philosophical

argument; the incompatibility of the elements contained in the story,—gentlemen and democrat being mutually exclusive terms. Second to that, one notices the inevitable presence of the miraculous. Namely, this hero is credited with having been an architect, landscape gardener, student of Biblical exegesis, scientific farmer, linguist, statesman, and philosopher. And yet, we are told, he became president of these states! How utterly impossible. By stretching one's imagination, one might conceive of such a being, dropped by chance, on a throne, but elected by honest, plain-thinking citizens? Never! The man never existed; his myth grew out of the nightmares of Alexander Hamilton. I tell you, young man, the more you study the scientific-historical method, inspired by the fraternal outlook of our day, the more you will come to know that great men are figments of the imagination, and that their works were written by others.

John gave vent to a weary sigh and turned once more to the manuscript. He was growing tired of Tessaract's iconoclasm.

Moreover, continued that indefatigable

philosopher, the word democracy, as you understand it, has a curious origin: being compounded from the Greek *demos*, meaning people, and the Anglo-Saxon, *cracian*, meaning cracked. This derivation is disputed, but the best philologists have upheld it in triumph. In this matter the Scripture is fulfilled, and despite the railings of your grandfather and his like, not only the meek, but also the feeble-minded, inherit the earth.

But Howe was absorbed in his reading. The stained pages had been covered over with the secret thoughts and fears of a gentleman whose nature was singularly like that of his descendant—independent, impractical, given to mysticism and his dreams. But the old man could wield a vituperative pen, and had set down bitter anathemas against all the reforms of his day, and desperate warnings against all that were to come. Upon those who would free slaves, as upon the provokers of war, his curse descended. Unfortunately for John, some of these railings were done in Greek, and here he was grateful for the broader culture of Mr. Tessaract, through whose assistance he

came to know how iniquitous was a certain Perkins, who had, on occasion, fed shot to his horse for the purpose of disguising a most distressing case of heaves—thereby deceiving the writer and purchaser, to his exceeding loss; how vixenish was a woman who, after promising him her favors, caused him to spend a January night of vain hope in a deserted and fireless cabin. But, in the midst of a series of maledictions hurled at the future, there was one passage which defied translation. Tessaract worked over it steadily for an entire day.

They never taught such Greek at Harvard, he declared. I can't make any sense out of it at all. If the other bits had not been so well done, I should say that the man knew no Greek. I'll read it aloud, and you can make of it what you will:—

Ἰν δαιες τω κομε θερε χαλλ βη ναστι μεν ὁ χαλλ
καλλ θεμσελς σενσορς ανδ φιλθι χαλλ βε θειρ μινδς.
Ἰωνι ανδ φαλλυς χαλλ δομινατε θειρ θοτς βυτ θη
χαλλ βε τοο φεεβλε φωρ ιωιωνς δεεδς. Θη χαλλ
σее ναυτ βυτ μαλισε; μαι μαλισε αβιδη βι θημ.
Μαι θη εατ θηιρ ωννε δυγγ; θε γρεατ Ωαθ ο Δοκτωρ
Σλοπ πολλω θημ τω θιρ τομβ. Σελα. . . .

Bah! take your hieroglyphic manuscript. With your permission I'll join my companion in cups and do justice to a most noble liquor.

As the twilight deepened, John turned page after page of incoherency, coming, at last, to a postscript in which the old Virginian had set down fragments of Goëtic theurgy and black magic. Drawing near to the bed of glowing coals that he might see, John read of the descending hierarchy of subordinate spirits, of Sargatanas, who makes men invisible, of Nebiros, who inflicts evil, and of Guland, who spreads pestilence. And while he read there came from the hollow caverns back of him the sound of dripping waters, and, from a tree, high up on the mountain side, there floated down the mournful calls of a solitary owl.

On the final leaf of the tattered document was a great seal of wax, the color of fresh blood, and above it were the words: This spirit has been tried by me, Sebastian Howe, and has done my bidding. Then followed a description of the four circles which must be

traced upon the ground, and of the pentagon which must be drawn within the inmost ring, and of the sign which must be made to summon the creature whose name was beneath the seal. And John, when he had done, laid aside the script and gazed thoughtfully at the smoldering embers, and debated within him whether he should do the thing that tempted him. Some secret sense warned him that it was an evil which might imperil his very soul, but his whole heart yearned after the unseen.

And he reasoned away his conscience, after the manner of flesh, and took assurance from the fact that his kinsman had pushed aside the veils and, looking, had lived. What John had sought in the cities of men he had not found, and he was yet hungry for adventure with the Beautiful. And if, perchance, at the heart of Beauty was some terror, he would take the risk. So resolved, he once more took up the manuscript, and with the blade of his knife lifted the seal whereunder were the words he should utter. With trembling fingers he traced the circles and the pentagon upon the

floor of the cavern, and, after a brief prayer for protection, pronounced the awful sentences from the ritual of demonology.

The coals threw out a fearful glow that made darkness blacker than before, and the air grew hushed and still. Then, from without, came the faint stir of a fumbling wind, and after that a voice:—

The Eighteenth Spirit of Lemegton awaits without to do thy bidding, but may not enter the domain of Clauneck. Speak.

Why, said John, getting to his feet and hastily crossing himself, I reckoned that I would call a spirit that had some pluck, and would show me. . . .

I may not enter the cave of Clauneck, cried the thing without, but since you have summoned me hither, I will make the sign of the crossed sack, and the eight pronged star, that Clauneck himself may perform the service you desire. But kindly erase my character from the floor.

Your character? John cried, rubbing out the rude design with his feet.

The only character we poor devils own,

responded the Eighteenth Spirit, his voice fading away into the distance.

Do you seek riches, hidden treasure, or material comfort? The words came with a burst of sound that was quite overwhelming. For an instant John was moved to flight. Then he beheld, at the mouth of the cave, a formidable figure having no resemblance to anything, human or non-human, that he had ever looked upon. Two great arms, each terminating in a single finger, having the sharpness of a keen edged knife, waved about the creature's indescribable head, making gestures of menace. Obviously this Clauneck was possessed of a dominating personality. John trembled.

You might at least give a civil answer to my question, seeing that you are an intruder in one of my abodes, and have besought my aid, cried the spirit.

I want no treasure, said John, I'd have no use for it.

You're wiser than most, observed Clauneck, and, by the same token, a perfect ass.

I can't follow your logic.

Men are accustomed to desire what has

no value in reality; in spurning this folly, you're wise. But what has no value in reality, has worth among your human herd; desiring not these symbols of success, you are a fool. What is it that you want?

But John didn't know.

Precisely, a very human failing; but can't you indicate, in some way, a long felt desire? I can't stand here idle all night, you know.

I would see that which no mortal eye has yet beheld (now that the moment of choice had really come, he was desperately embarrassed to discover that his wants were exceedingly vague, and his wits wool gathering), something which would, er, throw a ray of light on the meaning of our lives, he finished rather lamely.

I can't take you very far on that road, said Clauneck. We devils are as much in the dark as you; but, come to think of it, there is a little affair on tonight at your neighboring village of Potter's Corner, where, through powers I am able to wield, you may see something odd enough. Yes, on the whole, I think it will suit you admirably. Come!

And John, tremendously chagrined for that he had not pondered his petition more thoughtfully beforehand, and a bit apprehensive concerning the outcome of this nocturnal adventure, nevertheless folded up his vexations as a used garment and stepped out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XI

A GHOST DANCE IN A VILLAGE GRAVEYARD



HE bare branches of the poplar trees tapped out a curious music at the command of every fitful gust of wind; whispering pine and cedar, funereal enough in dark solemnity, inclined their heads and threw black shadows beneath the moon; cold white stones straggled about the uneven ground, marking mounds or hollows where long spent flowers rustled together in dry earthen pots. At one corner of this lonely acre stood a shivering chapel whose dilapidated blinds creaked mournfully upon hinges that were the prey of rust. Somewhere out in the night a forsaken cur howled dismal reproaches at the silent sky.

Well, said John, as his guide, with an air of finality, had come to a stop, this is nothing

but the old Potter's Corner burying ground. I've been here many a time.

This, or something similar, is a place where all of your kind are destined to come, sooner or later, observed his cheerful companion. Out of consideration for your feelings, I did not conduct you to your private cemetery. There is no need of destroying a man's family pride at one blow. But what do you think of these ladies and gentlemen? Clauneck, making an inclusive gesture, leaned against the gate post with an air of complacent proprietorship.

John looked about him carefully.

If you expect me to speak disrespectfully of the dead, you've found the wrong man, said he, and as for these graves, as I observed before, I've seen them a thousand times; and they don't look any different, except that there are some new ones—this one, here, for instance.

The elder Potter, at your service.

I don't see any stone.

But the gentleman, himself, is looking at you—a bit reproachfully, it seems.

At this startling information, John whirled sharply. Where?

To be sure! I forget that you mortals can only see a small fraction of what goes on under your very eye-brows. Come over here to this corner a second.

John followed cautiously. Now here, said Clauneck, stooping over the massive tomb of Henry Nelson, and spearing something with his sharp finger, is a leaf from the thorn apple, known to your clumsy botanists as *Datura Stramonium*, and used by oculists to enlarge the pupil of the eye. But they are ignorant of its greatest powers, and perhaps it is just as well so. For the dew collected on this rare specimen will enable you to see the souls of the dead.

John was skeptical. Why that particular leaf?

Do you see these five insignificant stones beside this monument? Each was, in her turn, a Mrs. Henry Nelson. The bones of a man who has experienced this five-fold blessing give the peculiar property of insight to the weed. Dew distilled upon its leaf during the

light moon completes the process. Now if one gathered this moisture from a leaf grown on the tomb of a healthy virgin who had departed mortal existence at thirty, one might—but I am not at liberty to disclose that secret; it would nullify the cosmic purpose. Besides, no such tomb exists. Holding the withered leaf with extreme care, Clauneck drew near and dipped his one free finger into the precious dew.

Open both eyes, wider please, and look up at the moon.

But John perceived, in the long, sharp finger, a likeness to a rusty dirk, and shuddered. I'm afraid you'll hurt! he protested.

Nonsense! I supposed idealists were devoid of fear—sentimental ones at any rate.

But, we don't see our ideals materialize every day, Howe stammered.

I will admit that the process of having one's eyes opened is not always pleasant; and meeting one's ideals face to face, is apt to be a rather shocking disappointment, but . . . there now! A little wider! That's it. Not so bad, eh? Now just let me press your ears once.

They need to be about as sensitive as those of your old house cat. Thank you!

Um! said John, confused for the moment by a multitude of strange sensations, and trying to get his bearings.

The deacon is still eying you with disapproval, observed Clauneck. He is that calf-headed soul just behind your back; excessive zeal in trading live stock to the disadvantage of his neighbors has produced the deformity.

Howe was too bewildered by the amazing pageantries weaving in and out on every side, to pay any heed to the froth of words. He gazed about him in mute astonishment. The unleashed souls of the dead were dancing wildly over their own tombs.

The strange participants in this nocturnal orgy were as various as the colors of their fluttering garments, or the grotesque movements they effected among the gravestones. Fashioned after the manner of apes or camels, swine or eels, peacocks or porcupines, devil-fish or swans, they made as ill assorted a company as ever moved to the compelling rhythm of music. Those who bore resemblance to hu-

man kind were rare, and, of this small band, a few of whom were undeniably gracious and pleasing, most were mere fragments of their former selves. Bodiless arms and legs pirouetted about upon the sere grass; a single hand, with uncanny agility, executed a jig on a fallen slate; while, balanced on the top of a pyramidal shaft, was a capering head, which, in frantic mirth, was tapping out a ghostly syn-copation. Before the chapel door nine wraiths flung themselves into a roundelay; in one large plot four stately dames, in purple robes, performed a saraband.

Music seemed to float from over the tree tops, to rise from beneath the crust of the earth; music tremulous and clinging like the silken threads of the dawn; music like the beat of fairy cymbals in the twilight; music that shrieked and cursed, the ineluctable agonies of the damned. And yet to each company of souls it was given to hear but one part of this discordant symphony, and they danced unmindful of the rest.

Can these be the spirits of men?

The soul of a man fashions a form in the

image of his desires; the hungers of his earthly lifetime are the forecast of his future; the pitch of his moods determines what he shall be able to experience. He who is but a moving hand was not more among the living; he yearned for nothing better than to do. The head on yonder monument left his fields untilled; he was content to think. Yet one fares no worse than the other; both are able to dance.

They are at least part human.

Is it, then, so wonderful to be human? These partook of the natures of the several beasts they represent, and have gravitated to their element. That bristling porcupine was a patriot who fell in one of your wars. It would have been just as well if he had been born as he is. Next to love, patriotism is your most dangerous virtue. The beast has no civilization, and merely protects himself and his young; you build a civilization, boast of it for a day, and then rend it to pieces. That childish passion you call patriotism. It is too silly for a simple minded devil to understand. But since you have so pronounced a preference for

humans, I beg that you glance at the pleasing figure of the lady who so vainly tries to conceal herself there behind the corner of the chapel.

Yes? That creature with waving snakes growing out of the back of her neck?

Right. But it is not certain that the objects in question are snakes, for they act more like animated, automatic whips.

Good Lord, but she must have been a bad one!

Oh no, Mehetabel Sneeks was, on the contrary, rigidly pious and eminently respectable; before your day she was the leading—er—detective in a girl's boarding school. The singular growth is no more than a well-nourished, chapel-bred conscience. Damned inconvenient, of course, but she wouldn't be without it for the world. The lashes enable her to see everything in a most interesting light; the acts of others, however innocent they may deem them, are, to her beaten eyes, fascinatingly evil. They simply will not let her see straight; and the result is that she looks upon this dull world as a thrilling melo-

drama in which all the actors are either hopelessly ugly or superbly vicious.

John turned away in disgust.

The music of the dance was stilled, and the dancers stood about in groups, or walked in pairs along the fretted paths.

Why, there's old parson Herrick! cried John, pointing to a stout spirit who was just then addressing a number of his fellows beneath a denuded poplar. He looks just as he always did.

He was an honest man, and content to be himself. You'll find several if you look about. But it isn't always easy to distinguish a dead man from a live one.

John Howe's attention was fixed upon a loathsome, priapic figure which ran, notebook in hand, from one slab to another, eagerly scrutinizing the brief, extolling epitaphs of the departed. That, explained Clauneck, divining the question, is a visiting ghost from a great city in the North. He was recently famous as a detector of filth in literature and art. He was the agent of a small company of people who strove to keep the arts in a state

of pre-adolescent purity. The better to do this, he surrounded himself with books and pictures of indescribable nastiness. He continues his mad search for impropriety, even around the abodes of the dead. Among the graveyards of this hemisphere he is, by far, the most unwelcome visitor. See the way old Eli Hopper makes faces at the wretch.

He ought to be ashamed of himself, traveling around in that shape, said John, blushing to the roots of his hair.

His shape is an excellent illustration of his predominant thoughts.

Eli was the first man buried in this place, said John. He was well thought of in his time, they say. But he isn't much of a looker, now, is he?

He was a fundamentalist, as you can easily see, observed his companion, but let us hear the two wise men over here by the walk. They may be able to settle your difficulties about the meaning of life.

Do you mean those men in uniform?

Quite.

Are they on their own graves?



"A detector of filth in literature and art."

Right. They were what you people called Yankee soldiers; they were killed near here and were unceremoniously dumped in unmarked graves. If they had lived they would have been metaphysicians of prominence. Don't be offended if they pay no attention to you; they are too absorbed in argument.

I remember being told something about their being Yankees, but that is all.

Pay heed!

Two men in full uniform were seated, oriental fashion, on the ground. One, in bored abstraction, was watching the stars, while the other, his thin, white face lighted with excitement, talked loudly:

But, my poor, dear friend, your scrambled mind is as miscellaneous as a chop-suey. The *I think* does not prove the *I am*. For the point is, you do not think; I do not think. *It* thinks. We are immersed in universal *Itness*, and the am is *It*. Am always was, and always will be *It*. Essentialism is the only explanation of the Cosmos.

Who can demonstrate the wasness of the *Is*? cried the other. Time and space do not

exist. Therefore, only *Is* is. The essential isness of the I am categorizes itself inevitably into the eleven great fundamental contradictions. . . .

That is it exactly; all is contradiction, and contradiction is *It*. That is not only the sum of philosophy, but also of her sister, science. How simple! How clear!

Do we come, then, from contradiction?

Surely. And the concrete manifestation of this principle is that substance which is, first, the goal of hunger, and then is rejected, for the most part, by the eager organism, almost as soon as it is accepted. Do you get my point?

Your thought is putrid. Haven't I explained for over forty years that we originate in vacuo? I think I am vacuum; that is enough.

It is enough for me, said Howe, and if you will permit me, Mr. Clauneck . . .

Howdy, Jawn! greeted a familiar voice. How air ye?

Well I'll be durned! exclaimed Howe, swinging about. Why, what are you doing in this place, Mr. Miller?

That's just what I was gittin' ready fer to ax you, till I seen you had on your same old duds. But me? Well, I reckon I've been here goin' on a year, more or less.

Why, when I last saw you, you were lookin' hale and hearty, and threatened to shoot me. It's certainly good to find you so friendly now. Where is . . . ?

I've done got over all that, Jawn. I don't blame ye fer gittin' so put out about my interferin'. But ye see I was plum fond o' that there gal, and I thought you wasn't never goin' to amount to nothin', allers a moonin' around like yer paw. And then the old family trouble made me kinda feisty, and ructious like. But since I've been about more in this here new world, I've found out that them that's always hustlin' fer their pennies, ain't got no peace. And I'm right glad to meet you, Jawn, for if you hadn't gone traipsin' away, I'd of forgived ye before I died.

John held out his hand in throaty silence.

They ain't no use tryin' to shake, Jawn, fer ye couldn't ketch a holt o' nothin'. You'll have to take my word fer it.

And Frances?

Well, now, said the old man, with something like a twinkle in his eye, you see you wuzn't around handy, so she up and left after I kicked the bucket, as the sayin' is.

But where? cried John, all a tremble.

That's fer me to know and fer you to find out. Don't expect the dead to make it too easy for ye, son. Good-by, my boy, and good luck.

John sprang forward to seize his tormenter, but he melted away into the very air, leaving no other trace than a chuckle.

Rather an unsatisfactory sport, trying to grasp the ungraspable; none but a metaphysician would enjoy it, remarked Clauneck.

Damn him!

But he had just forgiven you; you're evidently a good Christian.

I'm sorry, said John. He was really very decent, but what I asked him was more important to me than anything in the whole world.

You failed to mention it when you had your choice.

Hot tears quivered on the young man's cheek, and he was speechless.

Step over here to this small cedar, suggested Clauneck, sympathetically. I believe you will enjoy something cheerful. The young woman you are concerned about is certainly not among these, or she would have made herself heard; and where there is life there is ample time to be uncomfortable. You seem to have got on very agreeably without her presence for some days, and I can't altogether reconcile that leisurely spirit with your sudden grief.

You remind me of Tessaract, said John, irritably—always trying to make things logical, and to reason away feelings that can't be explained. I went away because she and her pa were both against me, and I wanted to forget.

Obviously you were succeeding, until this chance meeting. You mortals are beyond me.

Can't you see that her pa's death changes everything, and that I did come back because I wanted to be near, and that the old man just raised my hopes to . . . ? But what's the use?

I give it up.

Quite! exploded John, in the accents of profanity. But his anger had served to allay his disappointment.

At that moment the whisperings of the gathered spirits ceased, and a great hush fell over all the land. And Clauneck lifted a finger to his lips.

From out the heart of the cedar there came a blended harmony of sounds as soft as smothered sorrow, liquid with the tears of reminiscent grief, yet rising, as the volume grew, to an ecstasy of faith.

Not a ghost moved until the music died away; and to John it seemed that there was not room any more, in the whole wide world, for a mean or sordid thing. In this spot, he mused, one could abide forever.

Thus death is robbed of many errors, said Clauneck, interrupting his meditations.

John bent over the leaning slab at his feet, and studied the inscription. That was old Aunt Emma Wilson, he whispered.

She never leaves the protecting shadows of this tree, but on every night of the revels, mu-

sic issues from its foliage. She is a harp upon which every wind that blows evokes a melody. Clauneck spoke in subdued reverence.

On winter nights, in the old days, she never forgot the poor, said John. When the cabins in the mountain were empty of food, and the last meagre grist had been fed to the mill, her hands did miracles; when children lay on pallets, burning with fever, she was not afraid to cool them with her hands. When they said that she was wicked, she never more than smiled.

The time is drawing to an end, cried Clauneck, and we are getting unbearably sentimental. You must meet yet other of your friends.

The center of the village cemetery was occupied by a tall monument of dark granite, surmounted by the lifesize figure of a pompous, long-haired gentleman, whose right hand was raised in a frozen gesture of command, and whose left was thrust out of sight beneath the broad lapels of a generous frock coat. Senator Hezekiah Dole had been a sensational orator in his day, and the young sculptor, commissioned by a fame loving fam-

ily, had contrived to make permanent his most characteristic attitude.

As John drew near this monument, propelled by an eager guide, he became aware that beside the bronze figure, upon which he had often looked in other days, there was another, almost in duplicate, standing perilously near to the edge of the stone platform. This also took the pose of an orator.

Good evening, gentlemen, said the unbending figure.

Good evening to you! Howe replied.

It warms my heart to see you here, paying tribute to a statue which, I regret to say, has, latterly, fallen into neglect. But that is, I have come to know, the way of life. I am sorry to see, young man, that you are not yet among the tranquil dead.

That doesn't seem like you, Senator, to be wishing me harm. I always heard that you were a cheerful man, a regular optimist, as they say.

Ah, I was, my boy, and am still. No one can deny my ability to look upon the bright side of the most doubtful issues. I tried, in

vain, to convert both of my loving wives to that happy philosophy; but the more I reasoned with them, alas! the sadder they became. Even now they turn their backs and refuse to hear. Senator Dole indicated, with a graceful sweep of his hand, two pale spectres who leaned over adjacent tombs and gazed wistfully into the distance.

Surely it isn't optimism that makes you speak so slightingly of the blessings of life?

Precisely, affirmed the orator. Different countries, different loyalties. When I lived in the flesh, I declared that yours was the best possible of worlds; now that I have come to the grave, I maintain the same position. There is nothing like so beautiful as lovely death. There, I was daily tempted to a course of conduct which would have resulted in the overthrow of my career; here, even though I fell, nothing would come of it; for my record is a closed book. I say unto you, young man, if you want peace and safety, the grave alone is your goal. As for ambition, love, the thirst of power, they are no more than scurvy tricks to force sad mortals to expend their energy

toward a purpose that has not happiness for its end. You are but a miserable instrument of a heartless Destiny. Therefore, young man, use every device your wits may employ to hasten the day of your departure. . . .

Over by the fence, Deacon Potter was singing—

“I swapped my mare and got me a cow,
And in that trade I just learned how.
Tum a wing waw waddle,
Tum a jack straw straddle,
Tum a John paw faddle,
Tum a long way home.”

—In your state, a man must put up with conditions that are an insult to his soul, must listen to conversations about others than himself; here he can fade away most conveniently.

John was already depressed, and this bitter testimony from the dead, this demonstration of the futility of life, was overwhelming.

“I swapped my rat and got me a mole,
And the doggone thing went straight to its
hole,”—

sang Potter.

—There, said the speaker, is the only dis-

contented soul—he refrained from looking at his wives—in this abode of happiness. He is plagued by the desire to trade.

At this instant there came, from a nearby barnyard, loud and clear, the morning summons of a cock.

It is the signal, cried Clauneck. I hope that you have been well repaid for your visit, and that if, again, the immortals should wait upon you, you-may-know-what-you-want. Farewell!

Hastily transforming himself into a crystal of frost, Clauneck exploded with a sharp noise, and disappeared into the air in thin mist.

In every direction there was the sound of scampering spirits. Gentle souls, who yet preserved a lingering fondness for the life from which they had passed, and who looked with kindly eye upon the scenes of their childhood, faded out reluctantly, slipping into the leaves of trees and blades of grass with a sigh. But to the great optimist this modest retirement was an admission of defeat. Proudly he drew himself erect, and, after a last admiring glance at

his statue, gave a shout of exaltation and dived straight toward the earth.

The impact was terrific. The whole world was shaken. John was thrown to the ground. Senator Dole had justified his reputation.

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It would have been better not to have witnessed these wonders, to have known nothing concerning the rites of the dead, to have remained ignorant of their scorn towards livingness, to have permitted their separate shames to lie hid in sempiternal darkness, thought John, as he closed the gate. Just now the graves were quiet, and the churchyard bore that look of sanctity which compels respect and invites awe. No, they were not all bad; the music had been ineffably sweet at times, and Aunt Em! . . . Yes, sometimes, there was justice. It was pleasant to think of her like that. But the others? One had to strike an average. And who could control those secret thoughts which were daily modeling the thing that was to be the ultimate I am? Thoughts so secret that they could elude the grasp of consciousness and slip beneath

the will like a serpent. Ugh! Life had been questioned to its core; death robbed of its placid dignity.

In the grip of these melancholy thoughts, John walked slowly down the winding lane that would bring him to the mountain road. He must return to the cave before his companions should be stirring about the breakfast fire. Later in the day the mystery of his house must be solved. Just now he was tired of mysteries. But to be surrounded once more by the homely things that had known the touch of his father's hand, would restore a comforting sense of reality to this crazy world. Had the place been sold for tax? But no, he had paid this Caesar's tribute just before his departure—less than two years before. In a land of hastelessness and ease such drastic action was not known.

Here was the old road, washed and gullied as in the days when Hooker's men had pillaged the valley of its grain and herds. But what was that moving across the field toward the west? Was he to be yet again the victim of a sprite's caprice?

In the dim, crepuscular light two processions of maidens marched on soundless feet, and behind them, with a wand of silver, was one, less fair than they, who urged them gently away from the rising sun. Less fair she was than those who went before, but there was healing in her eyes.

Do not fear, she called—and her voice was like that of mountain waters—for I am Maya, and these be the daughters of Illusion, born of your desire.

John looked again and saw that they were, of a verity, the embodiments of his dreams.

You have hearkened to the words of the dead, and are cast down. Those who see naught but evil, and those who would glorify maggots with a halo, are alike in their madness. The bitterness of the one is the child of withered Experience, the sweetness of the other is born of Folly and Fear. One leads to scorn and the other to disgust. But I am the daughter of Wisdom and Joy. That which is seen under the white light of the noon day is Truth, but its galling burden is iniquitous. Its

memory were best in oblivion. But I, Maya, will come in the twilight, with these thy children, to comfort thee. . . .

As they passed on, John perceived that their faces were turned toward him; those of one procession looked with eyes of temptation, and wore a smile of witchery,—they marched to invisibility beneath an archway of ivory; those of the other were more tender, but as they silently vanished through a gate of horn, he could see their timid glances of reproach.

In the twilight, I will come again— Howe repeated the words over and over again as he walked toward the mountain. Indeed it was heartening to have heard that assurance; tonic it was to behold those fairy shapes after the diabolisms of the graveyard. He could see the glory of the sunrise without a shudder now, and as he drew near his own fields he could look with gladness upon their mantle of frost. Out by the barn were piles of cordwood, trim and neat, and by the rick of straw two spotted cows were munching a dainty breakfast. The morning light was caught and

reflected by polished window panes; while from the stone chimney white smoke curled upward to the sky.

Mammy might be living, from the looks of things, thought John; they surely have improved it. I owe them that much.

The ground beneath his feet crackled icily as he climbed the steep path, and, out in the forest, he could hear the snapping of dead branches, stirred by the morning breeze. Now he could see the reason for his sudden downfall on the night of his arrival. Stupid! I ought to have remembered how these banks fall in. But here, what's wrong now?

Down below, where but yesterday was a bank of moss and fern, was now a heap of stones and upturned, whitening roots.

With fear pounding in every pulse beat, he scrambled and slid down the rough face of the cliffs. One look was sufficient. The cave was buried beneath a hundred tons of limestone! The cave of Clauneck, his two unsuspecting companions, had been destroyed by the irresistible optimism of Hezekiah Dole!

Frantically he began to pull at the great rocks, only to realize, a second later, the futility of his efforts. He must get help—men, tools, at once. Poor Tessaract! Aliment! But there was no time for grief. They might be alive and suffering somewhere back in the cavern. Seizing roots and stones for support he mounted upward to the path. No doubt the folks of his own preëmpted house would lend a hand.

Is that you, Jawn?

—The great Sunset-rock on the top of the mountain; fishing with a barelegged girl at the old mill-dam; a double burden of books, from the schoolhouse at Potter's Corner, to the lonely cabin on the crest—McGuffey's Fifth Reader, Davies' Mental Arithmetic, Maury's Geography, Webster's blue backed Speller, Harvey's Grammar, Steele's Physiology, Harkness' Latin Book; two of each—O blissful burden!—the scent of jasmine and wild honey-suckle; slender fingers, stained with the juice of berries; twining fingers, clasped around the teetering muscadine swing; yielding fingers, crushed in a feverish

palm; clenched fingers of rebuke. Memories poured over him in a flood. It was not the witching voice of a goddess; but its even, common, everydayness was more welcome than magic.

Is this . . . are . . . are you real? He managed to stammer, looking about him in desperate anxiety.

Why, Jawn Howe! What do ye mean, talkin' that a way? Of course I'm real—jest as real as this here old dogwood tree. A flutter of gingham rewarded his gaze.

Are you alive? Am I just having a dream, Frances?

Oh Jawn, you're just like you allers was, pertendin' like! cried the Dream, emerging from the thicket above. And I'd begun to think ye was never a comin' home.

But you, you wanted me, France?

Now—archly—that wouldn't be fittin' fer a girl to say; not after you actin' so proud and uppity.

I wanted you, France; wanted you more than all the fairies in the world, and I've come back. Will you . . . ? But, France, I

mustn't. I forgot, there's been a terrible accident. There was an earthquake, and my two friends are buried—maybe killed—in that old cave. I must get help. . . .

Cave? There? They ain't no cave there.

I haven't got time to explain, but they were asleep when the quake came, and if they're not killed outright, they may be smothering to death.

Land's sake! Where was you when it happened?

Oh, I wasn't here. I was, I was,—well, I was over by the graveyard. He retained enough presence of mind to suppress that experience.

Hold on, Jawn. You say there was two of them fellers? Was one of 'em tall an' skinny, with a goatee; and t'other kinda short an' pot-bellied like?

Yes, but where . . . ?

—An' the little un calls Ole Goatee a doctor, an' the doctor talks like a dictionary? Well, I seen them pretty nigh an hour ago. I got up early to watch the sunrise, like we ust a do, an' while I was up there on the big

rock, I thought I felt a kinda treemer under my feet, so I lit out for the house. An d'rectly I struck the path, I heerd folks a runnin' an hollerin' like wild Indians, an I got behind a tree. The little feller, he was ahead a yellin', —Come on, Doc, this ain't no safe place! If it ain't guns, it's rainin' rocks!

Goin' like they was, they'll be clean over in Tennessee by now.

Thank the good Lord! Well, that surely does relieve me. Why, France, I'm shakin' all over.

Was there a real cave down there, Jawn? I never heerd tell of it before.

Anyway, said John, we were getting short of everything, and I didn't have any place to make them welcome. My home's gone, France.

You orter be ashamed of yourself, Jawn Howe. After me a workin' an' slavin' a whole year to get the place fitten to live in; washin' the old linen, an' killin' the moths, an' mendin' the rugs for you. An' every mornin' I've gone on the top of the mountain an' watched the valley where you might come; an' every-

night the latch string was out, so you wouldn't have to stand in the rain and cold. An' your clothes are mended, an' the dust is off'n the little books you ust a love. . . .

France!

The common, frost-spewed earth beneath, the gaunt, dry branches overhead, a gown of blue gingham, and a slip of a woman within, all grew very beautiful, and the world was solemn and sweet.

And, after a long interval of wordless joy:—It was you I wanted when I went out to seek mystery. You are the mystery. . . . But Maya said—I will come to you in the twilight.

Who is Maya?

A goddess.

That kind don't pester me, Jawn.

Down in the valley she drove the white children of my dreams.

Oh, I know what you've been seein', Jawn! cried the girl, winning sudden freedom from encircling arms,—You've come acrost Byron Dill's new drove a white heifers, that's what. But—realizing the man's bedraggled condi-

tion for the first time—Name o' Goodness, Jawn Howe, you shorely need a lookin' after! Men ain't fitten to take care of themselves, no how.

I reckon not, Frances.

An' look, there's old Lamentations, wonderin' what's become a me.

Fat and sleek, the ancient tortoiseshell cat looked with calm indifference upon the lovers, receiving his prodigal master's enthusiastic caresses with a weary flick of his tail.

I don't believe he cares much, one way or the other.

He cares for victuals and a place to sleep, like all sensible folks. Come on home, Jawn; you need a good breakfast, that's what you need. Look at Pussy!

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Lamentations, transformed into an arched symbol of invitation and impatience, marched homeward with a beckoning tail.

John gave a start, and looked from the cat to the woman, and then, abashed, from the woman to the cat.

Well, said John, I have followed gods and devils, dreams and philosophers; I reckon I might do worse than follow after the cat.

And Lamentations led the way.



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250

